



Henry Miller and the Surrealist Discourse of Excess

A Post-Structuralist Reading

Paul Jahshan

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To Douglas, Dave, and Boulos

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Introduction

How is one to talk about Miller?...Miller himself is one of those Patagonian authors who just won't fit into a book

Shapiro, 1959, 77.

The quandary Karl Shapiro faces in his 1959 essay, "The Greatest Living Author: In Defense of Ignorance," is a touchstone in much criticism of Henry Miller. As one of the most controversial authors of the twentieth century, Miller has provoked scandalised protest or unmitigated adulation. Philip Rahv remarks on a similar polarisation: "[Miller] is easily overrated and with equal ease run down or ignored altogether" (Rahv, 1949, 27), and Frank Kermode jumps to the perhaps understandable conclusion that Miller and criticism are "mutually repellent" (Kermode, 1962, 85). Unintelligibility, it would seem, sometimes breeds contempt and/or wilful oblivion from critics. Robert Ferguson, however, is more helpful and gets to the nub of the problem that is Henry Miller when he comments on the "exhilarating and disorientating" effect of certain passages, "suddenly surging out of a prose that is often lax and pedestrian...It is like waking suddenly to find oneself high on a mountain with no path in sight, nothing to indicate the means of ascent" (Ferguson, 1991, 331). As a partial response to the critical stand-off over Henry Miller and as a way of reinvigorating interest in a now overlooked author, my contribution will be to work on, and out from, precisely those passages in his work which have what I will call an *excessive* quality. After all, it is this excessive quality—sometimes associated with Miller's links with surrealism—which has defied, baffled, and sometimes silenced critics and readers alike.

Looking at the voluminous literature devoted to Miller¹ and, concomitantly, to his relationship or stylistic affinity with surrealism, one is surprised to find that, despite advances in literary theory over the last two decades or so, rather little is offered apart from biographical reminiscences—frequently prompted by Miller's own words—and issues of

undoubted historical, cultural, and political importance which yet fail to address stylistic concerns.

A brief incursion into Miller's personal life has been deemed able to shed some light on the American writer's propensity to make use of his verbal prowess. While this approach to understanding style is not, finally, satisfactory, we can at least begin a selective survey of Miller criticism here.

It is usually pointed out that Henry Miller as a child was constantly on the look-out for bizarre and/or grotesque situations, and his greatest joy was to make his peers laugh at his incongruous gestures and words (Martin, 1979, 15). Ferguson says that Miller was "one of those rare individuals who find the mere sounds of words intoxicating, and to have been equipped with an unusually synaesthetic form of imagination" (Ferguson, 1991, 7). This innate tendency was developed, still according to Ferguson, by the very immigrant milieu in which Miller grew up (7) and led him to hunt for the new or the obsolete words in sciences and pseudo-sciences, for "the lexicographer in him...thrilled to the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, especially to words like 'enantiodromia'" (228). Later, in 1932, Miller, as Jay Martin writes, stood stupefied as the flow of words ebbed out of him and writing "seemed no harder than turning on a tap" (Martin, 1979, 254).

The concept of verbal "flow" quickly became a favourite—and convenient—item in Millerian criticism. Lawrence Clark Powell, librarian at UCLA, writes: "An idea rises in him [Miller] like the headwaters of a river, first the merest trickle, gradually increasing to brook to stream to river, and finally to confluence with the sea" (Powell, 1960, 59). Alfred Perlès, Miller's life-long friend, reminisces in his *My Friend Henry Miller*: "It didn't matter what he talked about; he inspired himself by his own voice, the sound of his voice, intoxicated himself with his own words...Impossible to say whether it was a case of arson or mere pyrotechnics" (Perlès, 1955, 17–18). Miller is always, it seems, a "gifted raconteur excited primarily by the sound of his own voice" (Hassan, 1968, 99), and J. Rives Childs characterised the writer's speech as "verbal pyrotechnics" (Wood, 1968, 142).

Miller himself was instrumental in the propagation of the mystique of his verbal abilities. In a letter dated August 28, 1924 to his friend Emil Schnellock, he called his own writings "lush Millerics" (Wickes, 1990, 9) and, later, on June 18, 1930, he says about the writing process: "The stuff is pouring out of me like diarrhea" (58). His style he calls also "Milleresque" (Ferguson, 1991, 174), and he once made the striking comment: "I get frightened of myself sometimes...I don't know where the proper limits are" (158).

Just a step away from purely biographical issues, but nowhere nearer to a proper textual analysis of excess, the critics' continuous fight over whether Miller is to be castigated or praised over his verbal prowess is best exemplified by comparing George Orwell's words in his famous 1939 essay "Inside the Whale" with Salman Rushdie's 1984 essay "Outside the Whale." Orwell says that Miller's "monstrous trivialities" have created an "astonishing" style which gives "an idea of what can still be done, even at this late date, with English prose" and sums up by the pronouncement that the "adjective has come back, after its ten years' exile" (Orwell, 1953, 10). Rushdie, however, retorts that Miller's reputation "has more or less completely evaporated," and that "he now looks to be very little more than the happy pornographer beneath whose scatological surface Orwell saw such improbable depths" (Rushdie, 1984, 95–96).

A very different opinion is that of Norman Mailer, who, in *Genius and Lust: A Journey through the Major Writings of Henry Miller*, spares no effort in praising Miller's style by stressing that one "has to take the English language back to Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity" for Miller's reader is "revolved in a farrago of light with words heavy as velvet, brilliant as gems, eruptions of thought cover the page" (Mailer, 1976, 4). Mailer, quite enraptured, describes Miller as a "writer with a tongue like a 400 horsepower motor" (457).

Similarly, Lawrence Durrell, Miller's friend and fellow-writer, talks about the "prodigious tracts of roughage, its plateaux covered in uncut gems, its weird tracts of half-explored vegetation running along the snow-lines of metaphysics" and compares his style to that of Whitman and Melville (Durrell, 1949, 101). To others, Miller is "word drunk" (Littlejohn, 1962, 106), "inebriate of words...roguish...garrulous" (Hassan, 1968, 59), his despair is "carried off with Rabelaisian gusto," and "his images of decay burst into apocalyptic visions" (35). There is "something Gargantuan, something bordering upon caricature, in Miller's art" (Mitchell, 1971, 5) and "free-flowing fantasy-like associations" (Gordon, 1968, 87) abound. Miller's "violence of style" (Fowlic, 1944, 35) leads him to rage "like a tidal wave of sewerage" (Friedman, 1966, 140), a "jamming together of formless, exuberant imagery" (134), his style, to Kingsley Widmer, is a "miscellaneous steam of boozy egotistical verbiage" and "buffoonish gesturing" which yet produced work "of intrinsic merit" (Widmer, 1963, 113). Miller "puts into books hundreds of thousands of bombastic, ruminative, casual, pretentious, disorderly, foolish words which have not usually been put into books at all" (118). Kermode talks about Miller's "absurd savagery of expression" (Kermode, 1962, 87–88), and Philip Rahv notices that Miller is fond of

"using terms and images drawn from science, especially biology and astronomy; and his unvarying practice is to distribute these borrowings stylistically in a manner so insinuating as to produce effects of incongruity and alarm" (Rahv, 1949, 28), concluding, however, with: "The truth is that his bark is worse than his bite" (33).

It is clear that the early critics' own pronouncements on Miller's style are hardly less excessive than the object they attempt to elucidate.

However, with the advances of modern criticism, attention has slowly moved from biographically-oriented issues to ideological, cultural, and mythological concerns.

Kate Millett, in her famous essay on Miller in *Sexual Politics*, describes him as being "persistently misunderstood" and a victim of "systematic neglect," despite the fact that he might be "one of the most important influences on our contemporary writing" (Millett, 1971, 294). After this adulation, however, Millett goes to the core of the subject and praises Miller as important—solely, it seems—because he exemplifies what is worst in the American male: "Actually, Miller is a compendium of American sexual neuroses, and his value lies not in freeing us from such afflictions, but in having had the honesty to express and dramatize them" (295). He was the first to give "voice to the unutterable" (295), and therein lies his importance and influence.

In 1970, Jane Nelson's seminal study, *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller*, set the ground for the application of Jungian principles to the image structure in the works of Miller. To her, almost the entirety of the Millerian discourse revolves around a psychological struggle between the "I" and the unconscious symbolised by the womb (Nelson, 1970, 94–95). David Crossen, following in the path of Nelson but diverging in some essential points, devotes his 1978 thesis, *Apollinian [sic] and Dionysian: The Act of Myth-Making in Henry Miller*, to the study of the relationship between the myth of Dionysus and Henry Miller. The female sexual organ is, according to Crossen, the "key" that will unlock the mystery of love in *Black Spring* (Crossen, 1978, 134). Along these lines, Bertrand Mathieu, in 1976, tries to explain the word associations present in Miller's *Colossus of Maroussi* by the fact that a deeper reality is to be sought not in material objects but in the "subtler connections that exist between man and his universe, sometimes perceptible, sometimes intelligible, and sometimes wholly elusive to human understanding" (Mathieu, 1976b, 14). Mathieu, studying the Orphic elements in the works of Miller, describes a resurrection process, the two stages of which are called *katábasis*, the "descent into Hades," and *palingénesis*, the "joy of rebirth" (36).

While these cultural and mythopoeic forays have contributed to a better understanding of Miller's work, they all seem to have tackled the issue from one angle only, disregarding the multi-faceted, and thus complex, aspects of the writer's style and text.

Timid approaches, nonetheless, have been taken, in very recent years, towards a stylistic appraisal of Miller's writings, alongside reader-response issues.

John Parkin equates Miller's word-lists with those of Rabelais and speaks in this context of "logomania" (Parkin, 1990, 69). Millerian and Rabelaisian lists work as intertext with other works, and as a device to enhance free reader-response (71, 74). Parkin also mentions "bistylistic antinomy" (215), "polystylism" (228), and a form of hybridisation (237) as key terms and principles in Miller. The apparent dichotomy produced by an excessive use of imagery has prompted James Decker, in his 1996 *Spiral Form and Henry Miller's Anecdotal Life*, to use the terms "heteroglossia" (Decker, 1996, 192) and "bitextualism" (193), and Gilles Alain Mayné devotes his 1989 PhD thesis to the interesting parallels existing between Miller, Georges Bataille, and surrealism. Both writers, to him, "violate the canons of literature, and in particular, of surrealist literature" (Mayné, 1989, iv). Yet, incomprehensibly enough, Mayné still labels the deviatory passages as a "jungle" of "obscure metaphors" (98).

Finally, it is with Gay Louise Balliet, in her *Henry Miller and Surrealist Metaphor* (1996), that the first steps towards a stylistic study of the Millerian text and its links with surrealism are undertaken. However, Balliet wholeheartedly ascribes full surrealist status to Miller's text and meticulously follows the thread of surrealist imagery and mechanical devices in what she—erroneously²—calls the "Tropics trilogy."

Alongside the growing awareness of the benefits derived from a textual study of Miller's text, there has always existed, albeit as a passing reference, a parallel line of thought pointing towards the connection between that text and surrealism. Indeed, Balliet was not the first critic to notice the surrealist influence on the American writer; the ever-present threat of unintelligibility has prompted many to compare Miller's works with those of the surrealists.

William Gordon describes *Tropic of Capricorn's* texture and tone as "dreamlike, almost surrealist" (Gordon, 1968, 138), and Ferguson says that *Black Spring* contains some of Miller's "wildest surrealist writing" (Ferguson, 1991, 246), adding that the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy displays the "hilarious surrealism of the language" (334). Mailer talks about Miller's instinct for surrealist-like film montages (Mailer, 1976, 8), and Herbert J. Muller says that some of Miller's "virtuoso Surrealist performances even suggest

artiness" (Muller, 1940, 49). Orwell remarks that Miller's work is "very uneven, and sometimes, especially in *Black Spring*, tends to slide away into mere verbiage or into the squashy universe of the surrealists" (Orwell, 1953, 8). In fact, the "kind of inspired surrealist rant at which Miller excelled" (Ferguson, 1991, 304) and his "surrealistic visions" are seen by some as the "ultimate reach of Miller's accomplishment" (Littlejohn, 1962, 108).

Biographical criticism takes over again when confronted with this issue: the violent and anarchical style inherent in surrealism made Miller, according to Ferguson, aware of the barrenness of disciplined writing and "at once opened up a way out of the baffling strictures of literary orthodoxy" (Ferguson, 1991, 176). Miller's own defiant attitude, to Muller, led him directly to surrealism (Muller, 1940, 45). So strong was the apparent relationship between the American writer and surrealism that he was indeed first thought to be descended directly from dada and surrealism (Mitchell, 1971, xiv).

Again, Miller was to fuel future arguments by cleverly insinuating himself into the surrealist issue. Aware of the impression his works were producing in a period when surrealism was in full bloom, he describes himself in a letter to Durrell as writing surrealistically in *Black Spring* (MacNiven, 1988, 14) and, elsewhere, that the standard surrealist method of taking "dictations" he practised with great seriousness (Hassan, 1968, 202). Branko Aleksic quotes Miller saying with evident self-consciousness: "I was writing surrealistically in America before I had ever heard the word" (Aleksic, 1991, 59), although he later acknowledges: "I owe much to the Dadaists and Surrealists" (54). It has been duly documented, again in a rush of biographese, that Miller and André Breton, the founder of surrealism, were friends, and that Miller was invited by the surrealist group to exhibit his own water colours during the famous international exhibition "Surrealism in 1947" (Aleksic, 1991, 60). Kermode labels this connection the "uneasy relation with surrealism" (Kermode, 1962, 94) which culminated in Miller's famous 1938 essay "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere." This much-quoted piece contains most of Miller's stance towards the French movement and towards its founder André Breton. Miller emphatically proclaims in it: "As for myself, I need no leader and no god. I am my own leader and my own god" (*Selected Prose I*, 467)³. In the same essay he formulates his famous statement that there is no "Surrealism," but only "Surrealists" (484–485). He concedes, however, that, without doubt, "Surrealism is the secret language of our time" (482).

Both the excessive nature of the imagery in Miller's works, and its relationship with the same excess present in surrealism have then been

keywords present in most approaches to the American author. Both are thus intimately linked to issues of literary deviation and to the question of how the main recipient of this deviation, the reader, is able to *write* the text. A more informed re-reading of Miller's text will have to seriously tackle the twin problems of deviation and the reader, alongside obvious links with surrealist stylistic techniques.

It is with the Russian Formalists that deviation was to acquire full stylistic significance and outreach. The traditional notions of "form" and "content" became with Shklovsky, Jakobson, Tynyanov, and others, "material" and "device." These devices, when successfully used by the craftsman-writer-poet, bring about defamiliarisation, or *ostranyeniye*. To defamiliarise is to make things appear strange, and the language of poetry—and of literature in general—is one of defamiliarisation. Literary language and ordinary language exist by virtue of a differential relationship and it is, therefore, the aim of literary studies to analyse the differences between these two basic modes of expression, concentrating on defamiliarisation (Jefferson and Robey, 1996, 27–28).

Defamiliarisation in itself, however, cannot be apprehended, because it exists only in relation to what is "familiar," i.e., to what the prevalent norm is. Poetry is defined by comparison to what is *not* poetry. Literariness is then, in this dialectic opposition, very specific and achieves its specificity by *foregrounding* stylistic effects with the aim of defamiliarisation. Foregrounded stylistic effects deviate therefore from the prevalent linguistic and literary norms. Jakobson asserts that poetry is "organized violence committed on ordinary speech" on the three levels of sound texture (phonetics), rhythm and syntax, and semantics (Jefferson and Robey, 1996, 37). Very early, then, two "modes" of representation are posited: the norm, and the foregrounding devices; I will use, mainly in Part I, Jakobson's three-pronged approach to establish the relationship between these two.

But can a stylistic study of poetry take into account the three levels aforementioned and come up with results relevant to both the linguist and the literary critic? Such an issue was raised at Indiana University in 1958, and the papers presented at the conference were published by Thomas A. Sebeok in *Style in Language* in 1960. It is clear that the main concern of the participants was the attempt to find a consensus on questions of "deviation," "casual and noncasual utterances," "literariness," and the role and prerogatives of linguistic studies. I.A. Richards assumes that words have a life of their own, and live or die—i.e., produce effects of defamiliarisation or not—according to the way in which the artisan-writer arranges them. Matters of selection are not even under the complete control of the writer;

they are settled by the text itself among its constituent elements. Richards calls this successful interaction the "powers in the words" and the "movement" of the poem-text, insisting that neither the poet nor the reader control them. Words offer "bonuses" of meanings for the reader and even for the poet himself, catching him/her unawares. A simple word, when analysed or taken back to its etymological root, can yield unsuspected meanings which could enhance the poem's power of producing nodes of "possibilities of meaning" (Richards, 1960, 20-21). Evidently, the more a word deviates, by itself or by its placement, from the norm, the more "nodes of possibilities" are available. Edward Stankiewicz tackles the issue of deviation by saying that poetic language needs not violate any rules of the linguistic system, and the so-called violations are conditioned either by the language, i.e., they are already "there," or by the poetic tradition itself (Stankiewicz, 1960, 70). The "deviations" are therefore not only accepted but expected as well. No one writer/poet can claim originality for deviation for he/she is using the already available and permissible linguistic stock (71).

Another view is expressed by Sol Saporta who calls poetry the "noncasual language" (Saporta, 1960, 82). He argues that deviation, or what he calls "lower-order grammaticality," has always existed in language, and is, in fact, a part of language. It has been excluded only for the practical reason that it made the systematic writing of grammars too complex (84-85), and the language of poetry is, therefore, as "explicable" and prone to scientific study as any other mode of writing (86)⁴. The more difficult it is to incorporate a particular sentence into the grammar, the more ungrammatical it is (92).

Stylisticians like Leo Spitzer, Geoffrey N. Leech, Michael H. Short, Henry Widdowson, Michael Riffaterre, and Richard Bradford have added much to the concept of deviation: Leo Spitzer's seminal 1967 work, *Linguistics and Literary History*, is an integration between linguistic concerns, historical styles, and the writer's individual talent. The writer is a capable artist who uses the devices of language, producing a unique style which reflects his/her historical background (Spitzer, 1967, 42). The artist is exalted and treated as the engineering force behind stylistic originality (72). Spitzer quotes with firm conviction Georges Buffon's famous axiom: "Le style c'est l'homme" (11), suggesting that the artist is undoubtedly capable of creating original imagery. Deviation with Spitzer is not only common, it is necessary (15). A deviation is an expression "aberrant from general usage" (11) and, if taken in isolation, is apt to be unintelligible. But when deviations are taken together, as a whole, a consistency is uncovered. This common denominator Spitzer calls the "common spiritual etymon" (11), the

blueprint of the author's original and unique style, which puts him/her apart from all other writers. In fact, it is through deviation only that writers establish themselves by presenting stylistic features that do not belong to others. The writer's "vrombissant verbiage," as Spitzer quotes Céline's expression (22), exalts the Gargantuan dimensions of language. Struck by a stylistic deviation, by a "detail" (26), by a singular pattern, the stylistician embarks on a long journey from the surface of the work to its epicentre, to its "soul" (14). This approach, which he calls the "philological circle" (20), is predominantly humanistic and treats the "surface," i.e., the peculiar stylistic devices, as a way through which one can reach the writer's essence.

To Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, stylistics is, however, an exact science, and the stylistician, by his/her analysis of the devices of language, and by the reliance on the frequency of their appearance, becomes a statistician (Leech and Short, 1981, 42). Leech and Short reach a definition of style based on deviation and liable to a very scientific study (43). A "checklist" is even proposed in order to help locate and identify stylistic deviations (70).

A less categorical approach is that of Henry Widdowson in his *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*: stylistic studies are based on intuition, even those that purport to make use of scientific tools (Widdowson, 1986, 1). Yet the emphasis is laid on the linguistic aspect of literature (3-6). The critic's linguistic observations will lead him/her to deviation again, for in the world of literary writing, "one constantly comes across sentences which would not be generated by an English grammar but which are nevertheless interpretable" (14). Deviation is unintelligible by the standards of the grammar but is nevertheless interpretable by the means and tools of stylistic analysis. Concurring with Spitzer, Widdowson asserts that deviations are not random events fortuitously found in the discourse, and they should be understood, therefore, "not in isolation with reference only to the linguistic system, or code, but also with reference to the context in which they appear" (27).

The important point here is that deviations should not, and cannot, be taken and analysed in isolation. The relationship existing between casual and non-casual features, or "banal" and "nonbanal" utterances (Householder, 1960, 340), is a key feature of stylistic study. Indeed, it is by defining the dynamics of such a relationship that deviations are situated.

Michael Riffaterre comes close to Widdowson in his concept of deviation: stylistic function is not only the violation of external norms or a violation on the levels of selection and combination, but it resides also in the violation of norms which the text itself creates (Jefferson and Robey,

1996, 66). Style consists in the "establishment of a certain pattern of linguistic regularity which creates expectations in the reader that the 'stylistic device' then disrupts" (66). A double level then exists within the text: one in which linguistic registers are set or tuned to a specific form, and another where these same forms/norms are violated or flouted. It is the tension between the two levels which creates style, and I will return to various aspects of Riffaterre's theory throughout this study.

The issue of the double pattern is also the focus of Richard Bradford's *Stylistics*. Literary language is made up of features belonging to the poetic as well as to the non-poetic registers. The relationship between the features that are exclusively poetic and those which are shared with other linguistic discourses sets the text's balance (Bradford, 1997, 46). The tension also exists on the level of reality: the text, before it is set to writing, possesses more reality and immediacy than later, and diegesis (narrative) will always interfere with mimesis (69)⁵. The text always shifts between the two levels, incessantly urging the reader to distinguish between literary and non-literary elements (162). The double pattern shows the writer's double allegiance to stylistic modes of writing, and to referential ones, i.e., to the constraints of the language, and to the outside reality. Bradford's concept of the double pattern is of relevance here for he articulates with it a methodology of reading which, following stylistic procedures, would consist, first, in the *discovery* of basic operative items in the text, second, in the "naturalization" of what seems at first sight incomprehensible, the "translation" of the text and its "destylization," and, third, in the inevitable "judgement" on the value of the text (197).

Not all linguists and critics have, however, agreed on treating literary language as something worthy of special consideration. Marie Louise Pratt, in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, insists that literary language is not formally and functionally distinct from other kinds of utterances (Pratt, 1977, xii). Pratt tries to show that the intrinsic form of narratives essentially follows modes used in vernacular language. Interestingly enough, she cites Miller's *Plexus* as an example of delayed or inexplicit orientation (56). What puzzles the readers doesn't stem from an intrinsic difficulty in Miller's style or from a specific, deviatory use of language completely autonomous from accepted canons governing intelligibility. Miller and others are just "freer" in delaying or "flouting" the rules that are naturally found in spoken language. What constitutes deviation, if it exists at all, is, then, according to Pratt, not peculiar to literature, and should not be treated separately from a study of natural language. The thrust of my argument will

show the extent to which I disagree with Pratt's somewhat facile dismissal of Miller's stylistic peculiarities.

Todorov, in his *Poétique de la Prose*, takes a step further *away* from concerns of deviation within one text and places the work in a deviatory relationship with the other works, especially the preceding ones: "One could say that every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms: that of the genre it is transgressing, which dominated the preceding literature; and that of the genre which it creates" (Todorov, 1980, 10). The parallels with Riffaterre's theory are striking.

Stanley Fish makes the astute observation that if what is called "ordinary" language is plain, uninviting, and "impoverished," then "something that is then defined as a deviation from ordinary language will be doubly impoverished" (Fish, 1980, 101)⁶, and he delivers his *coup de grâce* thus: "...if I may put the matter aphoristically: *deviation theories always trivialize the norm and therefore trivialize everything else*. (Everyone loses.)" (101). The solution Fish offers to such a dilemma is swift indeed: instead of arguing that there is no deviation, he superbly asserts that "*there is no such thing as ordinary language*" (106).

In a neither-nor stance, deconstruction shows the very concept of deviation itself to be erroneous. Deviation is thought to be a "supplement" to normal discourse, something "added" to the order of language. The whole idea of a term showing hierarchical domination over another is faulted or, better to say, deconstructed and exposed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, and others. Logocentrism makes of deviation a supplement to its hierarchical superior, in this case a norm, but deconstructive analysis shows that the hierarchy is reversed and without deviation there would be no norm. Careful analysis shows that the idea of supplement "deconstructs" itself: normality is seen as such only in terms of non-normality—or deviation—and the very *raison d'être* of normality resides in its supposed supplement, deviation. Without deviation, there would be no normality, or, put differently, normality is "non-deviation," and contains thus its very opposite: the "always already" (Leitch, 1983, 171) of so-called supplements.

Miller criticism, as I have been showing throughout this chapter, is riddled with Derridean *aporia* when it comes to dealing with supplementarity: what is marginalised, what is relegated to second place—by labelling it "buffoonery," "clownishness," "pyrotechnics," "surrealist rant," and even the otherwise innocuous term "surrealist technique"—comes back with a vengeance, betraying the involuntary tension between what is presented, on the one hand, as Miller's autobiographical fiction, his eroto-

pornographic imagery, his portrayal of the American expatriates' life in the 1930s and, on the other hand, as the seemingly incomprehensible "flights" of style.

Taking my lead from Riffaterre's notion that deviation is not necessarily gauged relatively to an existing norm, but relatively to the *internal* norm it has itself created, and bearing in mind Fish's objections, I will present, in the course of my study, a *graded* version of deviation, moving from the more "conventional" kind to the semiotic one. The movement, from the outside to the inside, from the macro to the micro, will run the gamut of a deviation from an external norm, a deviation from other deviations which have become "norms," a deviation from a norm created by the same author in different works, a deviation from a norm within the same text, and, finally, a deviation from the mimetic to the semiotic level.

Theories of deviation are, as I have said earlier, incomplete if not intimately connected to a reader who is obviously needed in order to experience such deviation.

Umberto Eco, in his *The Role of the Reader*, puts forward a view of the reader who is an active "part of the picture of the generative process of the text" (Eco, 1985, 4). Eco calls him/her the "model reader," and this model reader is, paradoxically enough, a construct, initially, of the author, who has to foresee him/her. The model reader should be able to deal interpretively with the text the same way the author does (7). The result is a strange entity which is constructed both from outside and from inside the text and which is a crucial and indissociable part of this text (8). But even within this "model" reader, who is in fact an abstract entity, Eco makes a more practical distinction: there is a "naive" reader, who is unable to enjoy the text, and a "critical" reader, who "will succeed only by enjoying the defeat of the former" (10). A second reading is thus hinted at, for we can understand the critical reader as being one and the same with the naive reader, and the pleasure experienced by the first is the realisation of what is interpretively gained by not reading naively. This is clearer when Eco says that "in reading literary texts one is obliged to look backward many times, and, in general, the more complex the text, the more it has to be read twice, and the second time from the end" (26). Second reading processes will be crucial to my investigation of the mechanics of the Millerian text.

With Stanley Fish, the reader, and only the reader, is responsible for the production of meaning, which is an *event*, not an entity. This means that the reader's response is not to meaning, which then is supposed to be different from, or outside of, the reader. The reader's response *is* the meaning of the text (Fish, 1980, 3). The reader is called an "ideal" or "informed" reader

who is neither an abstraction nor an actual reader but a "hybrid" (48-49). Incidentally, Fish seems unable to escape the traditional stylistician's authoritative stance when he posits, throughout his case studies, a Spitzer-like ability to talk for his readers and to assume that they would see what *he* sees in such a statement as "Everyone would admit that something 'funny' happens in...[this] sentence" (32).

Michael Riffaterre's views on the reader offer an interesting compromise between those of Eco and Fish. His analytical procedure is based—in Spitzer-like fashion—on the axiom: "There is no smoke without fire" and he categorically states: "Whatever their basis, the value judgments of the reader are caused by a stimulus which is in the text" (Riffaterre, 1971, 42). The smoke which is supposed to reveal the fire is to be pointed at by "informants" who, preferably, will be

cultivated [and] who will use, insouciantly, the text as a pretext to show their knowledge: they will notice more facts in their hurry to make numerous commentaries and they will exaggerate the disjunction between what they call style and what they consider a more "normal" way of expression. (43)

Riffaterre is perfectly happy with informants who will point out what is obvious, anyway, to him, viz., the places in the text where "something" is unusual/deviant. He is, however, cautious to add that these responses can be fallacious, linguistically speaking, but that they will nonetheless point to "markedness" in the text, and will act, ultimately, as "signals of what has provoked them" (43). A Riffaterrian axiom is thus formulated as regards the pertinence of the informant/reader's response: "*Divested of its formulation in terms of value, the secondary response becomes an objective criterion of the existence of its stylistic stimulus*" (43). Put in simpler terms, what the informants are doing is to point to what they think is "marked" or unusual stylistically and leave it to the stylistician to sort out the causes of such response, regardless of the informants' judgements of value⁷. Riffaterre then distances himself from Spitzer's "philological circle" method by trying to be more objective in his approach and by relying more heavily on the accretion of signals before embarking on the stylistic study, avoiding thus a subjective focalisation on some marked elements at the expense of others.

For the sake of objectivity, Riffaterre prefers to use a group of informants divided into smaller groups working on entire stylistic sequences. This smaller group he calls "architecteurs" (46) and it is this idea of the reader which I will be implicitly using throughout my study. I justify my choice by stating that, among the numerous concepts of the reader, this appears to me the most viable, both in terms of terminology and in terms of methodology.

Terminologically, "archilecteur," like Derrida's "archi-lecture," implies an "above" reader, who is neither subjective nor objective, being, in fact, above the binary distinction altogether. Methodologically, my own group of informants, who become de facto archilecteurs in the specificity of the surrealist and Millerian stylistic sequences, are those same critics I have quoted earlier in this chapter. As such, they have provided me with enough signals to begin my stylistic analysis: Miller is a "clown," a "buffoon," madly "ranting," a dabbler in "pyrotechnics." These and others are signals sufficient to make one aware of a stylistic markedness in the Millerian text and of numerous *faits de style* (I borrow this useful expression from Riffaterre again to talk about stylistic effects). I have even treated silence, or the conspicuous absence of signals, as symptomatic as well, and I have thus been able to incorporate the "margins" of the Millerian text⁸.

Who then is the archilecteur of the surrealist and, more importantly, of the Millerian text? But first, will a woman respond differently to these texts from a man? Will a female-gendered reading be seen as "marked," as Sara Mills warns, and a male-gendered reading "unmarked" and simply expressing the norm? (Mills, 1995, 107) What a male reader may find amusing in surrealist texts and especially in Miller's might very well be read as insulting, demeaning, and sexist, since sexism can be easily and deceptively disguised as "wit" and "humour" (137–38). I have already mentioned Kate Millett's now famous attack on Miller's sexism, and this attack is very relevant for it heavily bears as well on the way the Millerian text is read by female-gendered readers. To Millett, Miller has elicited sympathy from most males, if not stylistically, then thematically, especially in his "masculine" version of sexuality in females (Millett, 1971, 296). It would be absurd to close our eyes to the obviously sexist picture of woman portrayed in *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Sexus*, *Plexus*, and *Nexus*⁹. Miller, in Millett's words, is a "gang" all by himself, and exemplifies the sexist attitude of the male in his pursuit of the three "F's," viz., "find, fuck, and forget" (296). Is Miller's "men's house atmosphere" (302), and his attitudes of "arrested adolescence" (303) of tremendous pleasure to female readers? Is his "humour," is his brutality in his language of sex (306) conducive to a value-free reading by female archilectrices? This is obviously a delicate question, and it is very difficult to disentangle matters of pure linguistic concern—if such a thing even exists—from ideological and gendered problems. It is, however, with such a concern in mind that I will approach the Millerian text.

When readers are faced with deviatory practices and excess, a response is not only expected, it is also favoured, for by responding, readers join in

the *writing* of a new text which spills over the borders of the initial textual encounter. Such a spillage is doubly important to my thesis: first, all spillages are excessive, and, second, the mechanics of spillages and the accompanying *writing* of a new text are very different when seen through the Millerian devices as opposed to the surrealist ones. As such, Roland Barthes' notion of the "readerly" and the "writerly" proves essential to the on-going dialogue around Miller's prose effects and, incidentally, around those of the surrealists¹⁰. The text is not a substance, but a field; not a finite object, but something that cannot stop, that is always going to the limits of enumeration, always paradoxical; it is dilatory, practising the infinite deferment of the signified, and at ease in the signifier; it is structured but off-centred, always without closure; it is plural, not only in the sense of having several meanings but also because its plurality is irreducible; it answers not to interpretation but to dissemination; it is not caught up in filiation but in intertextuality; the approach to it is through pleasure, and it is thus bound to *jouissance* (Barthes, 1977, 155–164). Barthes' use of the term "displacement" over that of "deviation"—although the term has also been used in connection with Derrida, as a displacement of *meaning* (Norris, 1987, 59)—refers to the degree of displacement the author imposes on language (Sontag, 1993, 462). The greater the displacement, the better the results, for displacement, as "logorrhea," (Barthes, 1996, 58) is a multiplying factor of pleasure in the text. The pleasure uniquely experienced by different readers derives from the fireworks show of words acting upon one another. Deviation is *redistribution*, the playful juggling with codes and registers, the exuberant exhausting of the infinite variety of synonyms (58–59), a game where sentences achieve the much-sought-after status of being "sexy" (Sontag, 1993, 422): displaced, redistributed, a sentence awaits the reader, always ready, as I will show later in this chapter and, more specifically, in Part II, to surprise and to please.

Modern texts are therefore, to Barthes, evaluated by the degree of "duplicity" found in them, by which is understood the two edges great texts nearly always have, and, more importantly, the "seam," the "cut," the "deflation" which occur at the very site of this duplicity (Barthes, 1973, 14–15). But reading the text and passing judgement are not innocent endeavours. Barthes points out that the innocuous statement "I read the text" is fraught with danger: texts are of two kinds, the "lisible" or readerly, and the "scribable" or writerly: the readerly text is closed to the reader and to itself; it is finished, dead, offered for consumption only. The writerly text, however, is open-ended, "started"¹¹ (Barthes, 1996, 13), "plural," and "polysemous" (6), liable to infinite interpretations and ludic behaviour. The

writerly text is offered to the reader not as consumption but as an invitation to creation (5). In fact, the writerly text is written by the reader himself/herself, each time differently.

As paradoxical as it might seem, and as offending to received knowledge as it will definitely appear, I propose that the surrealist text is, in fact, a "readerly" text, closed, and not obviously necessitating the active participation of the reader. The Millerian text, with all its "personal" and "autobiographical" details notwithstanding, elicits from the reader, on the contrary, a perpetual co-operation and, what is more, a constant *re-writing* of the text which makes of it a "writerly" production. I will show that the constant piling up of images in surrealism is not conducive to a writerly action, and that the "toppling over" and "rebuilding" dynamics of the Millerian text just *demand* such writerliness.

Accordingly, I hope to leave the "Millerian" text open to further interpretation and dissemination. The explosion of signs and relations will not surge from a science only (linguistics), nor from a hermeneutics (literary theory), but from a dialectical movement between the two, even if the impression gathered will be that I have dabbled with them interchangeably. If such it appears, it will be helpful to remember that the *undecidability* that arises from such a game, and the resulting *jouissance*, are geared towards the subtle deferment of the signified and the putting in its place a signifier that decides the rules of the game. It is in a similar vein that I will deal with the signifiers in the texts I have chosen. The extent to which the Millerian text allows itself to be disseminated will give the measure of its post-structuralist relevance.

But I have used the term "Millerian text" more than once already and a clarification is in order. I would like first to move away from authorial concerns and lean towards the concept of the author as expounded by Barthes. This is especially relevant since Barthes traces the beginning of the idea of the death of the author with the Symbolists and then with the surrealists (Barthes, 1977, 143–144). The author is but a "modern scriptor," and the text is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). With a single stroke, the problems of authorship and of influence are removed and replaced by the notion of intertextuality. What is more, when the author is removed, "the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile" (147), and what is left is the irreducible dissemination of the text. All this does not mean that the critic/reader is able or even permitted to extrapolate any meaning they want from the text. Far from it. Actual textual and linguistic constraints control

the leeway offered to any reading. Christopher Norris thus warns the readers of deconstruction, and particularly of Derrida, from the dangers of limitless interpretations (Norris, 1987, 113).

What happens, then, to style? Do we have to go back to Spitzer and Buffon? Or do we agree with Edward Said's equation of style with *voice*, the "recognizable, repeatable, preservable sign of an author who reckons with an audience" (Said, 1984, 33)?

I choose to call "Millerian" the features that are, on the one hand, those of Henry Valentine Miller the writer, but which are, on the other hand, not his property, since I will show that after the 1940s, after the writing of *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, these features are no longer his, and his style is no longer "Millerian." Miller has, as it were, *borrowed* for a while those features of the language which were used to carry his text along the lines of excess.

A useful analogy summing up my approach to Millerian authorship can be taken from Barthes' essay "The World of Wrestling." Wrestling is excess. Contrary to boxing, where the rules are made from without, imposed on the boxer who must professionally abide by them, wrestling is an all-open field where almost everything is permitted. The image of the "perfect bastard" is constructed:

[He is] essentially someone unstable, who accepts the rules only when they are useful to him and transgresses the formal continuity of attitudes. He is unpredictable, therefore asocial. He takes refuge behind the law when he considers that it is in his favour, and breaks it when he finds it useful to do so. Sometimes he rejects the formal boundaries of the ring and goes on hitting an adversary legally protected by the ropes, sometimes he re-establishes these boundaries and claims the protection of what he did not respect a few minutes earlier. This inconsistency, far more than treachery or cruelty, sends the audience beside itself with rage: offended not in its morality but in its logic, it considers the contradiction of arguments as the basest of crimes. (Barthes, 1973a, 24)

This passage neatly summarises most of what I have presented so far: Miller is a wrestler, a "bastard" who is held both in awe and is vilified and vituperated against. His text is excessive and unpredictable and seemingly "inconsistent" in the jumps it makes between the marked and the unmarked passages; he is a transgressor of linguistic and literary laws, yet he can as quickly revert to normality. The very real fascination exerted by Miller resides in his juggling, with equal ease and effortlessness, between a simple, almost mundane, narrative—which I call *unmarked*—and seemingly incomprehensible passages—which I call *marked*—laden with an uncommon mixture of words and images that can only be described as excessive. It is this feature in Henry Miller's works, specifically in *Black Spring*, *Tropic of*

Cancer, Tropic of Capricorn, and in the three volumes of *The Rosy Crucifixion* which, more than anything else, accounts for the Miller phenomenon. As a wrestler, he exhibits his art while on the stage, and departs when his wrestling skills are exhausted. As a wrestler, Miller's art is both his own and the property of the arena he displays his art in and of his audience of critics and readers. It is high time to restore Miller as a "perfect bastard" in his excessive use of the text, and to point to and identify him to this hitherto oblivious audience.

My contention indeed is that the marked passages in Miller's works have been quietly ignored, or mostly attributed to biographical factors. They have been dismissed, on the one end of the spectrum, as buffoonish, and, on the other end, as mere surrealist exercises. With the possible exception of Balliet—who still unchallengingly assumes that Miller was a thorough surrealist adopting, wholesale, the techniques and ideas of surrealism—no real effort has been exerted, on the part of critics, to highlight the relationship between the surrealist and the Millerian texts and to provide a definitive appraisal of the extent to which the "ranting" passages in the latter are indebted to the techniques of French surrealism. The osmotic relationship between the marked passages and the unmarked ones; the dynamics of such a dialectical movement; and the semantic fields around which such a dialectics revolves have been utterly ignored. Critics have been, in their majority, guilty of betraying a degree of blindness as to what constitutes, as I will endeavour to show, the essence of the Millerian text, viz., the dynamics of an excessive image which, though it uses techniques mainly attributed to French surrealism, yet creates a style which is peculiar to itself. Millerian criticism has simply not deemed this a venture serious enough to pursue, treating the so-called "surrealist elements" in Miller's text as a supplement, a margin, a sub-writing that is not the "real" Miller. Reading Miller, or "re-reading" him, as I propose to do, consists, if I may quote Todorov on Rimbaud, in "taking seriously the difficulty of reading; in not considering it an accident on the way, a fortuitous failing of the means which were to take us to the meaning-as-an-end; but in making of this same difficulty the object of our examination" (Todorov, 1987, 144).

In Part I, I embark on what appears to be a stylistic study of French surrealism covering the concept of the image and the three "registers" associated with such a production: the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic ones, as well as presenting a novel approach to surrealist deviation based on what I call macro- and micro-grounds. However, what I really propose in this part is that the surrealist image, by its excess techniques, slips into stylistic saturation and ends up defeating its own avowed aim of surprise

and shock. This image develops on a vertical axis, a-temporally, a pure *moment* which, however, cannot cope with the aims, mechanics, and results of stylistic deviation. In order to fully appreciate the extent to which the Millerian text achieves a highly efficient technique of excess which strikes a balance between a sequence and a moment, the contrasting excess of the French surrealist image must be delineated. The collapse of the surrealist image, its ultimate incapacity to achieve the reunion between text and reader, will be made apparent. This does not mean, however, that I will be playing the role of detractor of surrealism. It is only when compared with the Millerian image that the shortcomings of surrealist devices are made apparent. Furthermore, the stress is laid on the French version of surrealism, not only because the movement began in Paris, and because most Miller criticism is American-oriented, but also for the reason that the Millerian text is best understood in the light of a dialectical relationship with these other players in the game of excess: if Miller is a "bastard" wrestler, the French surrealists are outlaws and are, paradoxically enough, easier to categorise than someone like Miller who keeps moving across textual and discursive boundaries. By pitting these two against each other, a better re-reading of Miller is achieved.

In Part II, I propose to show that what I call the Millerian image is an excessive one and has, despite its being relegated as a margin, key features which, when laid bare, show a remarkable—and so far, to me, unique—use of stylistic and literary devices and techniques which have variously been described as "surrealistic" but which carry, ultimately, the specific *cachet* of a Millerian style. This part will form the bulk of my study and will deal with such issues as the surrealist spark when seen through the Millerian text, the Millerian metaphor, the quest for voice, automatism, deviation, spaces and succession mechanisms between "marked" and "unmarked" modes, double-patterning, the Apollo-Dionysus connection, pleasure and duplicity and, finally, an account of what Riffaterre calls the "matrices" as I apply them to the Millerian text, as opposed to the macro/micro-ground notion found in surrealism. Bataille and myths of sacrifice and destruction will also figure as running threads throughout this part.

NOTES

1. Apart from individual essays, articles, PhD theses, and books, the main critical thrust on Miller's works has come up in three edited anthologies: George Wickes' 1963 *Henry Miller and the Critics*, Edward Mitchell's 1971 *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, and

Ronald Gottesman's 1992 *Critical Essays on Henry Miller*. The chief concern in these anthologies has remained, despite the span in years, mainly biographical.

2. There are only two "Tropic" books.
3. For the sake of clarity and convenience, I will be citing Miller's works throughout this study by using only the title followed by the page number. With Breton, I will be citing the name, work, and page number.
4. The reader may have noticed the emphasis on "poetry" as distinct from "prose." However, I will adopt Tzvetan Todorov's definition of *Poetics*: "The word *Poetics* will refer...to all of literature, whether it is in verse or not; it will almost exclusively mean, however, works in prose" (Todorov, 1973, 20).
5. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* mercilessly destroys this blatantly phonocentric attitude.
6. This trend is similarly found, albeit in a different context, in Deborah Cameron's *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* which enumerates three objections to what is any rigid theory of deviation: first, researchers will find what they initially set out to find, second, the logic of supplementarity will mercilessly topple down all systems which make of deviation a margin not organically and essentially related to the whole, and, third, deviation theories work one-sidedly only, for why would a deviatory form be seen as such, and not as a norm against which the initial norm thought of is a deviation? (Cameron, 1986, 45-46)
7. It is interesting to note that Fish's biggest problem is with Riffaterre and his notion of the informants/architecteurs. Fish's meticulous attack can be pursued in his *Is There a Text in this Class?*, p. 86-87.
8. Hinez Hedges, in her *Languages of Revolt* (1983), makes use of Marvin Minsky's application of frame theory to psychology and, most specifically, to cognitive theory, to explain the effects dada and surrealist writings have on the reader. I will be exploring this view in more detail in Parts I and II.
9. Incidentally, the same texts I will be using in this study. The link between them and the picture of the female will be explored in more detail in Part II.
10. Bakhtin identifies, similarly, two modes of writing: poetry is essentially monologic and is compared to a "Ptolemaic" universe, standing alone, in no need of an "other." The narrative discourse of the novel is "the discourse of the other in the language of the other" and is "bivocal" (Bakhtin, 1991, 144) and thus dialogic. The novel is then "the expression of the Galilean conscience of the language" which strives on the multiplicity of tongues (183) (My translation. All sources in French used in the Works Cited section have been freely translated by me).
11. I will be using in this study the verb "to star" in its Barthean sense, that is, as a translation of the French verb "étoiler," to "make as a star."

► Part One

"Un homme coupé en deux:" The Collapse of the Surrealist Image

"All they want is surprise and shock," she said. "But we become shock-proof so quickly."
(Celia to Arele about avant-garde poetry in I. B. Singer's *Shosha*, 1979, 59)

This part, as I have suggested in the preceding chapter, will do a number of things. First, since it deals mainly with surrealism, it will serve as a re-reading of surrealism in the light of Riffaterrian stylistic approaches. To be more precise, I will show that surrealist writing, in its zeal to express what it identifies as the "inner man," has made such use of automatic writing—its discursive method *par excellence*—that it has in fact abused it by a process of saturation of the reader. Daniel Delas, in his preface to Riffaterre's *Essais de Stylistique Structurale*, explains this saturation effect:

An accumulation of aesthetic units characterised by the same contrastive trait produces a context of variable length, the characteristic of which is this contrastive trait. Each repetition of the process equals a progressive reduction of the stylistic potential obtained at the beginning. (Riffaterre, 1971, 13)

Simply put, the more a *marked* term is used, the less it becomes recognised as marked, and the more "normal," or *unmarked* it appears. This saturation is, in my opinion, the *aporia* of the surrealist text, the worm in the apple, the hidden deficiency in the heart of the automatic process which, I repeat, is the *modus operandi* of surrealism. Since, as I will show, the surrealist image is geared towards the production of a "spark" that will, supposedly, jolt the reader into a recognition of his/her inner nature, the *moment* is of paramount importance as it acts as the opening of the gate to the unconscious world. André Breton, the founder of surrealism, uses the analogy of the battery: if the spark produced by the metaphor is not strong enough, the current will not flow. Riffaterre's theory, as I will be using it, will serve to show that

saturation works in fact against the battery analogy: repeatedly and rapidly sparking a battery will produce a much less conspicuous spark than the first, or preceding one, because the battery power would not have had enough time to stabilise. Conversely—and this I will show to be the hallmark of the Millerian text,—sparking a battery and allowing sufficient time for it to stabilise (what is mistakenly called “recharging”) will actually give the impression that each spark is of the same intensity as the first, or preceding, one. How the battery analogy works, actually, in the surrealist—and then, in the Millerian—text will be analysed in full detail later on in this part. This will explain why I have gone to great pains to provide my reader with numerous and varied examples that show this process in action. This will also explain the stress put on the chapter which deals with the phonetic side of automatism: the surrealists themselves have attached great importance to the lexical side of their literary productions, and passing over this potentially “saturation-friendly” phenomenon would be tantamount to ignoring one of the most important features of the surrealist text, and therefore to overlooking the very different process by which the Millerian text itself constructs its imagery of excess. If the Millerian text is shown to attain its goals both in terms of reader response and in terms of textual survivability without recourse to phonetic “tricks” and word games, then the disproportionate allocation, made by surrealism, to these purely technical devices will be the more apparent.

It is to be kept in mind, however, that not all surrealist texts exhibit saturation. I will be arguing that the Symbolists, earlier, and some surrealists, mainly Louis Aragon, have used the “spark” method more economically and thus with more long-lasting effects. I call these the “border cases” and will treat them accordingly, showing that they exhibit features which are one step closer, on the stylistic spectrum, to what will be recognised as a peculiarly economical Millerian treatment of excess.

The treatment of excessive imagery will therefore be seen as exhibiting a spectrum-like design. At one end of this spectrum, no sparks are produced at all for, to go back to the battery analogy, the two poles of the battery are of the same polarity; at the other end, the continuous, repeated, and sometimes frantic sparks just discharge the battery and eventually produce almost nothing as well. In the middle, a strong-enough spark is produced at regular intervals, intermittently and economically. Aristotle, in the seventh book of his *Poetics*, remarks on this same spectrum, giving us a first glimpse of the importance of the duration and extendability of the *moment* in time:

[F]or beauty consists in magnitude and ordered arrangement. From which it follows that neither would a very small creature be beautiful—for our view of it is

almost instantaneous and therefore confused—nor a very large one, since being unable to view it all at once, we lose the effect of a single whole; for instance, suppose a creature a thousand miles long. (Aristotle, 1965, 31)

And it is this middle usage which is the hallmark of the Millerian text. I will have first to define the band of the spectrum occupied by the surrealist text and analyse it in terms of its own goals and in terms of the actual effects on the reader. If Miller is to be re-read, his text needs to be accurately situated relative to the other players on the spectrum of metaphors.

Second, this part is also eminently relevant to the concept of “deviation” and to that of excess, since one of the fundamental concepts of the production of the surrealist image is to strive for the strongest spark possible. This spark can only be engineered by putting together elements so distant, semantically speaking, from one another, that the effect will be one of surprise and defamiliarisation. If deviation is a movement broken or stopped in time by stylistic *faits de style*, if markedness is to stop the *sequential* flow of time in unmarkedness, if *temporality* and *sequence* are the hallmarks of a narrative discourse expanding horizontally to be abruptly cut by the *image*, then surrealist excess produces only ephemeral and transient deviatory effects. Consequently, the effect on the reader will be at first disorientating and deviatory: architectes/lectrices will focus, almost immediately, on the “funny” or “weird” nature of the surrealist metaphor, and as such will have identified areas of concern as to the norm(s) they have been habitually exposed to. I will show that on the three levels of the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic registers, the surrealist image “deviates” for a time from the more accepted forms of textual strategies. It will also be shown that not all excess produces desired effects of deviation: if the surrealist image is excessive, yet the “packaging” of this excess does not yield, from the point of view of the reader, a sustained effect which can be called deviatory. The Millerian image, on the contrary, though exhibiting a more controlled use of excess, attains such reader results more forcefully.

Third, a corollary of the surrealist image and its attending spark effect is the *nature* of the response of the reader. An impression one might get from the surrealist image is that it is so deviatory that it allows an almost complete and unfettered response on the part of the receiver of the text. This reader is supposed to be given free rein in the interpretative process because of the ambiguity, vagueness, and ethereality of the images produced. Indeed, it is the avowed aim of the surrealists and the dadaists to involve their readers in the creation process. This might work, to a certain extent, in the case of the dadaists who have no underlying structure to reveal except maybe the absence of any structure at all, but with the surrealists it is another matter:

contrary to what they advocate, a surrealist text can only be read as an *effect*, not as a *cause* of surrealist “insight” into the “inner world.” As a haiku, in Japanese poetry, can elicit a response only in a like-minded enlightened person¹, a flash of recognition as to the vistas experienced by both writer and reader, so does surrealism when it presents to its readers the findings of the landscape charted. To an “outsider,” surrealism is mystifying. To another surrealist, surrealism is the supreme proof of access into the “inner world.” The consequence of this is startling: the surrealist text is seldom a writerly one, in the Barthean sense, allowing the reader full participation and creation of his/her own text. On the contrary, the recognition-like character of the image, which is closed to most readers, makes of it a very readerly text that has to be almost passively experienced and regarded as a didactic process that *shows* the reader, with great pains, what he/she should be seeing. Todorov, in his study of Edgar Allan Poe, reaches a similar conclusion when faced with the style of the American writer:

The superlative, the hyperbole, the antithesis: these are the weapons of this easy rhetoric...Poe consumes so many excessive feelings in his sentences that he leaves none for the reader...the narrator deploys so much emotion that his partner, the reader, does not know what to do with his anymore. (Todorov, 1987, 113)

Saturation, it can be seen, is closely related to the readerly nature of the surrealist image. Ultimately, I will be arguing that the Millerian text is more writerly in that it allows its reader a stronger participation in the creation—or re-creation—of this same text. Again, I show in this part, through concrete examples taken from the French surrealist authors, the point about readerliness. We need to remember that the spectrum mentioned earlier applies as well to the readerly-writerly continuum, and that “border cases” in surrealism will exhibit different characteristics. My treatment of dadaism, the precursor of surrealism in deviation, will likewise try to situate it in its relationship with both surrealism and Miller.

NOTES

1. Roger Munier, in his foreword to a translation of representative haikus, believes, however, that the practice of the haiku, whether in its writing or in its reading, is in itself a spiritual exercise. It is interesting to note that he continues by stating that “what the finished haiku proposes is an experience which can be identified, more or less, with that of *satori*, of enlightenment” (1978, iv). If such is indeed the case, how can the un-enlightened understand the experience of *satori*, except as a mere pointer?

Chapter One

The Surrealist Image

Using a convention analogous to the “once upon a time” found in fairy tales, Breton recalls the night of his initiation into surrealism in 1919:

An evening...before going to sleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that I was unable to change a word of it, but different somehow from the noise of any voice, a rather strange sentence taking shape...It was something like: “There is a man cut in two by the window” but, being accompanied by the feeble visual representation of a man, walking, and cut half-way through by a window perpendicular to the axis of this body, it was unequivocal...I was dealing with an image of a rare type and I hurried to incorporate it into my material of poetic construction. (Breton, *Manifesto*, 31–32)¹

Breton adds that he had barely acknowledged this first image when a flow of other similarly gratuitous happenings overwhelmed him. Not a man to dismiss onerous manifestations lightly, he got in touch with his friend Philippe Soupault and both held non-stop marathon-like sessions with the aim of re-producing the initial surprise felt by Breton (33–34). What happened was something of a milestone in the history of literary thought, as John H. Matthews attests: “Breton and Soupault were among the first to demonstrate how linking words in defiance of common sense can afford glimpses of a new reality” (Matthews, 1977, 11). Indeed, this defiance of common sense found expression in the hundreds of pages written in the frenzy of discovery and, delving deeper into the world of Breton and Soupault, who took turns writing, and whose authorship of each and every piece or line is extremely difficult to disentangle, one faces the following:

Oozing cathedrals vertebrate superior
(46)

and

The will to greatness of God the Father does
not exceed 4810 metres in France, altitude
taken above sea-level
(81)

It is also chastening to realise that *Les Champs Magnétiques*, although the first surrealist communication, was by far the easiest to understand and to submit to stylistic analysis. Written in the space of eight days, with the writers experimenting with various tempos ranging from normal speed to very high speeds (14, 19–21), the two young authors soon lost their grip on reality and Breton was subject to hallucinations (15).

The inauguration of surrealism had happened. Impressed by the discoveries of science related to electricity, and the still lingering appeal of mesmerism, the two authors decided on the title of their book, *Les Champs Magnétiques* (11), a pseudo-scientific attempt at providing a “scientific” experience, although not a “logical” one (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 157–158): the scientific side consisting in being as objective—or as non-subjective—as possible while the flow of words and images poured out of them, and the a-logical side being the product itself.

It is true, however, to say that the two writers had stumbled upon a new and untapped reservoir of literary and linguistic output. That the images produced in such a carefree manner could possess such stylistic connotations was astounding and the writers realised that their discovery was indeed something never seen before (Matthews, 1977, 58–59). Breton and Soupault were, however, not seeing themselves as visionaries or seers or prophets, but as pure “auditives” (58) and “scripteur[s]” (Béhar, 1979, 238)². One might say that they were, in a sense, Riffaterian “architecteurs” of a special kind, being both the authors and the dazzled readers of their own work.

This abandonment to the flow of words and images was soon labelled “automatism” (Breton, *Manifestes*, 36) and the officiants to this newly discovered cult vowed total obedience to this “magical dictation” of the mind (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 125). The aim of automatic writing was “to find the secret of a language, the elements of which stop to behave as wreckage on the surface of a dead sea” (165). The result of the 1919 experiment and automatism’s heyday in 1922 (Nadeau, 1973, 90) were later enshrined in an official form with the publication of the *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme* of 1924, in which a clearer and more mature definition of surrealism was presented in somewhat pompous terms for the world to admire:

Surrealism, n. m. Pure psychic automatism with which one tries to express, either verbally, or in writing, or in any other manner, the real functioning of the mind. Dictation of the mind, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, outside any aesthetic or moral preoccupation. (Nadeau, 1973, 36)

One can marvel here at the perfect use of all stylistic registers in the enunciation of an overtly *anti-rational* method, and at the dictionary entry-like format. But then follows, in the manifesto, and with extreme ease, a recipe for the production of the famous automatic dictation, a recipe called “Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art.” It proposes no less than to guide the apprentice into the recesses of his/her own mind³. The process is simple: one has just to write quickly without thinking about it. If stuck, it is enough to just choose a letter—always the same,—write it, and let the flow of words continue from this letter onward (Breton, *Manifestes*, 41–42).

The images that are “found” are supposedly pure spontaneous creations that owe nothing to reason or to logic (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 77). Alain Jouffroy, writing a preface to Breton’s *Clair de Terre* in 1966, wholeheartedly adheres to this concept of gratuitous spontaneity:

Read Breton: the automatism springs in his sentence like pure genius...it leaves the ending of every line, every page, unmistakably unpredictable...its only law is superb fancy: the dance of the spirit tied to the body, the mental dance which takes the whole being and makes it run risks which it thought itself incapable of...the tide is never regular, the voice never monotonous, the verse never expected; surprise becomes omnipotent: it is the jet, the first jet, the inevitable, irreplaceable first jet which decides the attack, the theme, the variations, the interruptions... (Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 13)

But, obviously, showing that the effect obtained is that of spontaneity does not necessarily imply that the means to this effect was spontaneous, as Jouffroy would have us enthusiastically believe.

Lest any one should believe that automatic writing is not an art at all, nor a supposed means of self-discovery—and such must have been the impression, it seems,—but a mere blurting out of incongruously structured images, Matthews offers this answer to charges of mechanicality:

Such a conclusion takes shape and takes hold easily enough, if one misreads the adjective *automatic* and interprets it as synonymous with *mechanical*, thus failing to appreciate why Breton gladly placed faith in automatism. The essential difference is the one separating an apparatus operating mechanically from an instrument attuned to a particular function, better yet, an instrument capable of attuning itself to that function, which it modestly intends (and not is intended) to fulfill. (Matthews, 1991, 34)

This explanation raises, in fact, more questions than it answers. Isn't an "instrument attuned to a particular function" itself an "apparatus operating mechanically?" And when an instrument becomes "capable of attuning itself to a function" and capable of conscious active intention, it then ceases to become an instrument and the analogy drops. Furthermore, could Matthews decisively show the difference between surrealist writings and randomly-generated computer sentences?⁴ Maurice Béhar, the foremost authority on surrealism in France, adds:

In the creative act, the surrealists refuse any idea of control, effort, work. They reject the thought and lucid act, as well as the obstinate pursuit after perfect form through the hesitations and the re-writings, while, however, permitting them at times. (Behar and Carassou, 1984, 77)

Should we then agree with Riffaterre who says that there is no automatism, only an "automatism effect" produced, albeit unconsciously, and implying no foul-play, by the writer (Riffaterre, 1983, 222)? Will Miller be making a judicious development of this rather problematic issue of the genuineness of automatism? I will hold my judgement on this point for later, and will turn, instead, to Aragon vehemently defending surrealism—and contradicting Breton's dicta in his first manifesto:

Under pretence of surrealism, any newly-come dog thinks himself authorised to equal his filthiness to genuine poetry, which is very helpful for self-esteem and idiocy... There is a way, however shocking this may seem, to distinguish between surrealist texts. By their power, by their being new. It is with them as it is with dreams: they have to be well-written... To write well is like to walk straight. But if you stagger, don't offer me this sorry sight. Hide yourself. This makes one feel shameful. (Aragon, 1939, 188–89)

This enthusiasm for automatism, however, was to undergo fluctuations, not least with Breton himself who, as early as 1925, one year after the publication of his first manifesto, discovered the "relative inadequacy" of surrealism obtained through automatic writing (Nadeau, 1973, 131). In 1929, automatism had so degenerated among certain members of the surrealist group that the technique had lost all experimental aspects and become a pathetic notation of "the flow" without concern about what was happening inside (177). This prompted Breton's second manifesto, but the mechanical lure had already taken over, witness this interview with Breton in 1947 who clarified the position of automatism:

Even if automatism, confident of its resources, doesn't feel the need any more to stay in the forefront, it goes without saying that, in surrealism, it is not threatened by any disfavour. Better, I hold it ready for an altogether new jump the moment one finds the way (a mechanical one) to take it away once and for all from autocriticism which is the open door to its own negation. (Breton, *Entretiens*, 257)

The elements of the by-product variously called "automatism," "automatic writing," or "dictation of the mind" were simple: dreams, the imagination, the duality between reason and the freedom of the mind, and the marvellous, all dashed with a heavy sprinkling of a nascent psychoanalysis tailored to suit the specific needs of surrealism.

Dreams and the oneiric life are the cornerstones of the surrealist production of texts. It is in fact not dreaming per se which serves as the hotbed for such productions as much as it is the somnolence that directly precedes sleep, as will be the case with the Millerian text. The *pre-positional* aspect implied in such a view is a point worthy of notice: it is both a *pre-paration* to the stream of images supposed to gush forth, and a *pre-paration* to that which comes before the rational, conscious expression. It was at such a moment that Breton, in 1919, experienced his "un homme coupé en deux" epiphany and it was then that he realised the value of such verbal apparitions: "These sentences, remarkably imaged, and of a perfectly correct syntax, had appeared to me as poetic elements of first order" (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 124). Later, in 1948, Breton was to say in one of his poems, "On the Road to San Romano:"

Poetry is made in a bed, like love
Its shuffled sheets are the dawn of things
(Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 122)

From somnolence to dreams, however, there was only a small step to take. Matthews quotes Breton saying in 1959:

The dreams of man and his delirium have culminated in my poems. It is not up to me to make them state their names; proteiform, they culminate several meanings. I have respected their confusion. I have let their flight have free course. My words testify to their perpetual metamorphosis. (Matthews, 1977, 57)⁵

The world of dreams was therefore the place in which oneiric objects take on new forms and meanings. The genesis of a stylistic study of syntactic and semantic registers will have to take place in this supposedly intangible and ever-changing world and follow it up to its concrete, actual, and verified representation as writing or speech.

But Breton was faced with the problem of the author's complete powerlessness while dreaming, as opposed to almost complete control while awake. To him, then, the focal point of creative production was an in-between state. His book *Les Vases Communicants* illustrates the dynamic relationship between the two states, *a dialectical relationship later to be actualised in Miller's movement between two modes of writing*. Breton begins by relating a particularly vivid dream and proceeds, after giving an "explanatory note" on the prevailing circumstances at that time—another *supplemental or marginalised* aporia?—to interpret the dream in truly Freudian terms. No object is left to chance, and everything seems to fit marvellously. In the second part of the book, however, he takes the opposite direction and, beginning by relating "strange" happenings in his day-to-day life, ends up interpreting these events—or the effects of these events on his psyche—as explained or shaped by his dreams. Life is thus made up of this continuous movement between the day and the night, as exemplified by the title of the book itself.

Dreaming is also strongly related to excess, which explains why surrealist imagery appears so extreme to some readers. In fact, the imagination threatens the economical and regulated flow which will be a characteristic of the Millerian text. And is a balanced flow really desirable after all? What about excess? Are surrealists, in a true show of excess, denying temporality and choosing an economy of words? And does Miller reach his own excess through another route, controlling the flow, and re-establishing both writer and reader in the rational world from which they regularly, but powerfully, depart? How Miller is able to regulate the flow and keep the excess will be examined later on, and progressively appraised as this study unfolds.

Breton thinks indeed that the imagination is not fully developed in everyone. In his first manifesto, he bemoans the fact that this imagination, which admitted, during childhood, no limits, has to relinquish its dominance towards the twentieth year, leaving the person a prey to a lusterless destiny (Breton, *Manifestes*, 14). Life becomes a mode of living in which reason rules and imagination is relegated to its most menial tasks.

But even before surrealism, dada had vehemently attacked reason, comparing the brain to "a crab...left in the bouillabaisse" (Tzara, 1996, 20) and strove to produce a language on which reason could have no hold (23). Reason is a "decoy" (Matthews, 1977, 88), the role of which is to entice people away from real life and confine them to utilitarian activities devoid of all beauty.

Poetry is the departure from rationality (15), the stepping away from the "original sin" which is reason (Matthews, 1991, 71), and the going back to

the Eden of pre-rational language, the language of poetry before the Fall (71). If "style," as it is known generally, is a matter of "straight" thinking, of submission, then "style" is attacked mercilessly. Matthews seems to adopt surrealist phenomenology quite straightforwardly whereas I will be assuming a more critical standpoint which will problematise the heavily logocentric assumptions presented by the French school. The different attempts of Futurists, dadaists, and, before them, of individuals like Isidore Ducasse, the self-styled Comte de Lautréamont, and Arthur Rimbaud, at rebelling against the yoke of logic and reason in style are "screams" against "language-as-prison" (Lautréamont, 1973, 9).

Language is seen, with its rigid conventions, its impregnable grammar, and its intransigent style, as what is most representative of the power of reason in life. Reason's strongest bastion—and last stronghold—is language. Shaping language according to its dictates, and strengthening itself by the same token through language, logic has stifled man's creativity and imagination. Surrealist activity, therefore, aspires to search and destroy the rational content of language (Mead, 1978, 27) if it is to free mankind from the tyranny that has for so long held it in chains. Paradoxically, the surrealists are not only working *on* this language but also *with* it. Surrealist poetry and prose consciously transgress the rules of language—on all three stylistic registers, I must add—aiming at the liberation of the imagination (Matthews, 1977, 34).

Imagination is thus a cognitive agent (Matthews, 1991, 64–65) of a nature different from reason, yet its logic is that of the subconscious (Mead, 1978, 26), which is logic enough for the surrealists. Imagination is not, according to them, *distorted*, although it may appear quite so to the common reader, but is in fact *freed* from rational restrictions (Matthews, 1977, 103) and submitted to the hegemony of desire⁶. What appears as distortion is in fact the result of reason not being able to postulate logical links since it has been—presumably—ousted from the process altogether. Error, thus cultivated, is an asset to Aragon:

Vainly reason denounces to me the dictatorship of sensuality, [sic] Vainly it warns me against error, who is here queen. Come in, Madam, this is my body, this is your throne. I flatter my delirium like a beautiful horse. False duality of man, let me dream a little about your lie. (Aragon, 1945, 11)

But, one may ask, if Breton was able to trace the events of his dreams in *Les Vases Communicants* to logical explanations, and give to them a rational interpretation, how could he—and his followers—so indignantly throw out reason? Breton, however, not a man to worry about such "logical"

problems, went on to concentrate on the potentials of the imagination as he saw them—in somewhat of an incestuous manner, it must be said—in Ducasse's *Chants de Maldoror* where transgression and excess are at their peak:

For Ducasse, the imagination is not this abstract little sister who skips a rope in a square; you have her on your lap and you have read your perdition in her eyes. Listen to her, you will at first think that she doesn't know what she is saying; she doesn't know anything, and, in a little while, with this little hand which you kissed, she will flatter, in the shadow, the hallucinations and the sensorial troubles. (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 163)

To Breton, the imaginary is "that which tends to become real" (Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 100) and Aragon likewise warns: "Let no one be mistaken: the imagination is never kept unpaid, she is already the awesome beginning of a realisation" (Aragon, 1945, 167). Awesome indeed if one considers the effects of an overwhelmed imagination on everyday life. Insanity and its attending excess, barely brushed by Breton himself in 1919, was not something to guard against as much as something to explore⁷. The surrealist group in fact celebrated the 50th anniversary of hysteria as a clinical concept discovered in 1878 by Jean Martin Charcot, and Breton emphatically declared it "the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century" (Nadeau, 1973, 158). He adds in his first manifesto that he will spend his life "provoking the confidences of madmen. They are people of scrupulous honesty, whose innocence equals mine. It took Columbus to go with madmen to discover America. And look how this madness took form and lasted" (Breton, *Manifestes* 15–16). What are called madmen are, to Breton, people whose grip on reality, and hence, on reason, had weakened and faltered, opening by the same process the doors to the unfathomed continent of the unconscious, of dreams, of hallucinations, and of excess. The surrealists prided themselves with being able to reach the same grounds experimentally by means of automatism (Nadeau, 1973, 188).

It is clear by now that Breton's theories of the unconscious were largely influenced by the works of Freud, for, as Matthews explains,

[D]ating from 1916, [Breton's] acquaintance with some of the ideas of Sigmund Freud made him particularly responsive to automatic writing as a method whereby the creative act could be prolonged beyond satisfaction of the ego, to put the practitioner in illuminating contact with the super-ego, as images welled up unbidden from levels within over which reason exerts no control. (Matthews, 1991, 39)

In fact, Breton was so engrossed by the idea of reaching common ground with Freud, or, more covertly, of acceding to that scientific recognition which had obsessed—and eluded—him since 1919 with *Les Champs Magnétiques*⁸, that after corresponding with the Austrian professor for a while, he was granted a visit to Vienna, the consequences of which were not very positive: Freud kept evading the subject of surrealist endeavours and Breton left disappointed. In later letters, Breton attacked Freud who admitted his inability to understand surrealism (Breton, *Entretiens*, 82). Breton, however, was keen on making a differentiation between the two methods, the psychoanalytic and the surrealist. If the means looked similar, the aims differed markedly. Although desire is acknowledged as the driving force behind man's conscious and unconscious behaviour, psychoanalysis tries, among other things, to sublimate this desire, to domesticate it, to transform and steer it away from morbid impulses, whereas surrealism, on the contrary, does its utmost to realise this desire in any form possible (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 208). Only through the complete release of desire can poetic activity reach its fullest. Thus, although Breton and his school vehemently rejected the blind adherence to what are perceived to be the canons of art as only impeding the productive pursuit of poetic goals, yet their aim was clearly aesthetic, namely, the production of the surrealist image.

The image is the product of the surrealists' attempt to gauge the depths of the unconscious. Breton asserts his belief in the ultimate coming together of dream and reality—both contradictory in appearance—into a "sort of absolute reality, of *surreality*" (Breton, *Manifestes*, 24). Surrealism is not, contrary to popular belief, an escape from reality into nonsense or a defiant rejection of everyday life. According to the surrealists, it is in fact just the opposite: a tighter grip on reality (Matthews, 1991, 63). The surrealist reality is seen as more encompassing than its everyday counterpart because the latter is confined to the world of the day, whereas the former, as "experimentally" shown in *Les Vases Communicants*, blends the world of the day with that of the night into something that combines the two and goes beyond them. The age-old philosophical quarrel about the dual opposition in man's nature and in the universe is thus promptly disposed of (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 9). This world of surreality is the best picture yet given of what surrealists call variously "the inner world" or "the inner model" (Matthews, 1977, 54, 103) with the difference from psychoanalysis that this inner world or model is a generator of poetic images.

Gerald Mead, in his *The Surrealist Image: A Stylistic Study*, analyses the concept of the image according to the direct predecessors of Breton: Valéry,

Marinetti, and Reverdy, his contemporary. To Valéry, the poetic mind produces images of an associative nature, on the paradigmatic axis. Its images are analogical and symbolic. The inner world is thus mirrored in the symbols created. To Marinetti, the Futurist image is syntagmatic and feeds on a combinative aspect of elements. It introduces distances and works outward, in an expansive way, in what is called "rapports vastes." It is semi-analogical in that the elements of the image are taken analogically, but not associatively. Reverdy, on the contrary, bases his image on a "rapprochement," or the coming together of distant realities, and is thus the opposite of Marinetti's, while still situated on the syntagmatic axis. Far from being expansive, this approach is geared towards bringing together hitherto distant elements (Mead, 1978, 17–21). Breton was initially impressed most by Reverdy's 1918 definition of the image and included it verbatim in his first manifesto of 1924:

The image is a pure creation of the mind.

It cannot be born from a comparison but from the coming together of two realities more or less distant

The more distant and accurate the coming together of the two realities, the more emotive power and poetic reality it will have. (Breton, Manifestes, 31)

But Breton later adds that something was missing in this definition and gives his own explanation in another book written in 1947, *Signe Ascendant*. Adding to the "rapprochement" issue, he says:

This condition, absolutely necessary, cannot be held for sufficient. Another condition, which in the final analysis, could well be of ethical order, appears. Let us beware: the analogical image, as far as it sheds light, brilliantly, on partial similitudes, cannot be translated in terms of equation. It moves, between the two realities set forth, in a determinate way, which is under no circumstances reversible. From the first of these realities to the second, it marks a vital tension turned when possible towards health, pleasure, equanimity, grace given, consented usages. (Breton, Signe Ascendant, 11–12)

What Breton is doing here, and it is not very clear how he succeeds in doing it, is to go beyond the mere obvious mechanicality of *rapprochement* or, to say the least, beyond its mere arbitrariness.

The technique of "rapprochement" was to exert a deep and lasting influence on surrealism and to colour both its artistic and philosophic vistas. Here is Breton's definition of this key concept:

It is from the rather fortuitous 'rapprochement' of the terms [of the image] that has sprung a particular light, light of the image, to which we allow ourselves

extremely sensitive. The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. When this difference does not exist, like in comparison, the spark will not happen. (Breton, Manifestes, 49)

From this definition of *rapprochement*, it is clear that the value of the image depends on the degree of dissimilarity between the two elements (the electric battery analogy). In comparison, where the two elements are very similar in nature, no surrealist spark is produced. In the example "she is white as snow,"⁹ the two elements do not semantically violate any compatibility features, and do not strike the reader unduly. When, however, the two poles are markedly opposed, the spark produced is sufficient to let the "current" flow. Breton gives in his manifesto some examples taken from his fellow surrealists:

I am standing against a wall, with greening cars and charred lips.
Éluard (Breton, Manifestes, 39)

The ruby of champagne.
Lautréamont (50)

In the burnt forest
The lions were fresh
Vitrac (51)

These examples present, obviously, more semantic difficulties, and thus produce the desired poetic spark. Breton emphatically writes:

To compare two objects as far distant as possible from each other, or, by any other method, to put them in presence in a striking and abrupt manner, is still the highest task to which poetry can pretend. (Breton, Les Vases Communicants, 129)

A question is raised: would *any* two distant objects be eligible for the roles of two images, A and B? Or would they need to belong, in a surrealist way, to a more fundamental level, viz., to the "inner world," where the *rapprochement* process works in accordance with the law of correspondences? Furthermore, it is stressed by Breton and by most other surrealists that the spark should not be consciously sought. How can this apparent dilemma be solved? The answer is by the already mentioned technique of automatism. It is only when automatism is fully mastered that the "inner world" is produced and represented in the image, the impression of which is described by Aragon in his *Le Paysan de Paris*:

You are given an ink bottle with a champagne cork as lid... Images, fall down like confetti. Images, Images [sic], everywhere images. On the ceiling. In the straw of armchairs. In the straw of drinks. In the switchboard of the telephone panel. In the shining air. In the iron lanterns that give light to the room. Snow down, images, it is Christmas. Snow down on the barrels and on credulous hearts. Snow down on the hair and on the hands of people. (Aragon, 1945, 100)

This power is even more emphatically given expression in Aragon's other famous work, *Traité du Style*:

Poetry is by essence stormy, and every image must produce a cataclysm. It must burn! Heat-generating cotton wad. Mustard up your nose. Don't you ever water down your fuel, poor man. It must burn high! (Aragon, 1939, 140)

It is the clash of the signs which provokes this stylistic *fait de style*. Indeed, the surrealist image is of stylistic import, as Mead stresses, since it is "simply the moment when the surrealist potentials of language are realized. The surrealist image is seen as a linguistic event" (Mead, 1978, 28). This image, according to Mead, is not metaphorical in the accepted sense, for it does not function in terms of equation. The other point worth noticing is the visual value of such a pronouncement. Is the "image" just a metaphor for a linguistic effect produced, or is it a visual representation as well? The encounter happens *in situ*, through the contact of both elements, while preserving the semantic distance (29). A relationship between the tenor and the vehicle cannot be established. The concept of rapprochement itself makes this paradoxical relationship possible, for by bringing together two elements with a view to producing the poetic spark, no semantic rapprochement is in fact achieved in the sense commonly acknowledged as in the case of the "usual" similes and metaphors. The two elements just come together as exemplified in Lautréamont's famous "fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table between a sewing machine and an umbrella" (Lautréamont, 1973, 234).

Breton, however, when faced with the stylistic nature of the surrealist image, tends to lose himself in contradictions. Talking about analogy, he says:

I have never felt any intellectual pleasure except on the analogical plane. For me the sole *evidence* in the world is governed by the spontaneous, extra-lucid, and insolent relationship that is established, under certain circumstances, between one thing and another... the most hateful word seems, to me, to be "thus". (Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 7)

And whereas, in the manifestoes, Breton plays down comparison as a trite way of producing images, he elevates it elsewhere to a much higher status:

In the actual state of poetic research one cannot be overly impressed by the purely formal distinction that has been made between the metaphor and the comparison. It remains, however, that one and the other constitute the interchangeable vehicle of analogical thought and that if the first offers resources of fulguration, the second (as one may see in Lautréamont's "beautiful as" images) presents considerable advantages of *suspension*. It is clear that next to these two, the other "figures" that rhetoric persists in enumerating are absolutely devoid of any interest. Only the analogical trigger interests us immensely: it is only through it that we can act on the engine of the world. The most exalting word we have is *LIKE*, whether it is pronounced or not. (Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 10)

Elsewhere, Breton contradicts himself again by debasing analogy altogether: the metaphor, in surrealism, enjoys all the rights, leaving the analogy "far behind." If both honour the "correspondences" system, there is, however, "between the one and the other the distance separating heaven and earth" (Breton, *Manifestes*, 171). If all metaphors are analogical to a certain extent, not all analogies are, however, metaphorical, which would explain Breton's preference for the metaphor and would clarify why, after all, he decided to stick to it. Quoting Lautréamont, he asserts that "the metaphor gives much more service to human aspirations towards the infinite than would have it those who are imbued with prejudices" (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 70)

The metaphor is indeed favoured by stylisticians with what it has to offer in terms of richness and complexity. Ernest Fenollosa—although speaking in a different context—in his study of the poetical elements present in Chinese characters, marvels at the metaphor which is one of the best ways the poet has to get rid of the "dead plaster" of copulae, and to give life back to the strong transitive verbs. The words, then, "come together" (Fenollosa and Pound, 1972, 43), an image echoing Breton's "The words are making love" statement (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 141). Riffaterre states that the concept that would account for the succession of surrealist images is what he calls the "extended metaphor."

What is called an extended metaphor is, in fact, a series of metaphors semantically tied together by syntax and meaning. They belong to a single sentence or to a single narrative or descriptive structure. Each expresses a particular aspect of the whole, be it a thing or a concept, represented by the first metaphor in the series. (Riffaterre, 1983, 203)

He confidently adds:

The succession of derived metaphors confirms, with a repeated exercise of the referential function, the aptness of the primary metaphor. The extended metaphor thus leaves the reader decoding it with an ever increasing [sic] impression of its appropriateness. (208)

Three points should be made here: First, the examples given by Riffaterre to illustrate his point are taken from among the least challenging in terms of semantic irregularity as, for example, the following: "A trickle of a poetic idea, which, in André Chénier, would flow into an elegy, or in Lamartine, would pour out into a meditation and ultimately become a river or a lake, immediately freezes in me and crystallizes into a sonnet" (203). It is clear that the water/fluid imagery is easily followed and is in no need of a concept such as the "extended metaphor." Second, no attempt has been made to deal with longer prose or verse pieces because, understandably, the problems posed by extended images over long stretches would be too great to handle efficiently with the "extended metaphor" model. Third, the concept of "extended metaphor" itself runs counter to the very essence of surrealism and automatism. Although it is pertinent to argue that the stylistician's aim is to elucidate the various *faits de style* regardless of judgements of value, it is yet improbable that a major concept such as the non-conscious/non-reasoned production of images can be disregarded as a purely stylistic construction.

A different attempt to explain the process of the surrealist image is exemplified in Rosalind Krauss' essay "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in which she tries to take back the image to, what appears to her, its original and essential place. Photography is, contrary to all expectations, the paradoxical origin of surrealism. Krauss reminds us that in one of Breton's article, "Le Surréalisme et la Peinture," vision is given a primary role and, quoting Breton, "visual images attain what music never can" (Krauss, 1993, 93). The eye, by its power of capturing the immediacy of life, is akin to automatism and equally stands above reason. More, Breton's first manifesto centres around the visual image of a man cut in two, within what Krauss calls "the experience of hypnogogic [sic] images" (94). But when Breton starts to get confusing is, still according to Krauss, when he allots first place to automatic *writing*, a preferred medium, and puts down vision as *trompe l'oeil* (94). Some might argue that the image found in automatic writing is itself a representation of the inner self, yet, as Krauss points out, even this is ruled out by the fact that automatism, by its very nature, is not a representation, but a presence (96), which is true to the extent that the surrealist *rapprochement* is a bringing together of two realities *in situ*, on a purely syntagmatic level. Krauss' argument becomes

clear when she states that photography is, in fact, and maybe despite Breton himself, the locus of surrealist thought: "What is at stake, then, is the relocation of photography from its eccentric position relative to surrealism to one that is absolutely central—definitive, one might say" (101), even though Breton says that in *Nadja* "...the abundant photographic illustration has for its aim to eliminate all description—which was knocked down unconscious in the *Surrealist Manifesto*" (Breton, *Nadja*, 6). What is significant in Krauss' study is the importance given to the visual side of the surrealist image since, as I will be trying to show, it is the a-temporality of this image and its non-narrative character which account for the saturation effect.

Description for the sake of description is one of the mortal enemies of surrealism, an example of what Breton calls the "information style," a style avoided at all cost as useless and non-conductive to the bringing up of any *rapprochement*. In this context, it is interesting to bear in mind that Miller advantageously uses description and narrative discursive styles while keeping with the *rapprochement* effect. Indeed, Miller does not share the surrealists' aversion to novels as is shown in the following from Breton:

If the pure and simple information style...runs almost exclusively in novels, it means, one must acknowledge, that the ambition of the authors does not go far. The circumstantial character, uselessly particular, of every one of their notations, leads me to think that they are having fun at me...And the descriptions! Nothing can be compared to their vacuity; it is everywhere superpositions of catalogue images; the author feels more and more comfortable with it, he grabs the occasion to hand me postcards, he tries to get me agreed on common places...(Breton, *Manifestes*, 17)

The aim of surrealist painting was "to reach the land of desire that everything, in our time, conspires to conceal" (Matthews, 1977, 29). Breton emphasised, in the same work cited by Krauss, *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, that he found it "impossible to consider a painting other than as a window about which my first concern is knowing what *it looks out upon*" (Matthews, 1977, xxii). Juan Miró is also quoted as saying: "I thought it necessary to go beyond the 'plastic fact' to attain poetry" (27). To the surrealists, the mind and the image of that mind in action, in presence, *in situ*, are complementary (Matthews, 1991, 18), and can be best seen in Breton's *Signe Ascendant* where, among essays and poems, is included a piece entitled "Constellations:" 22 plates painted by Miró between 1940 and 1941 are juxtaposed with corresponding poems by Breton. Side by side, they form the unavoidable truth—to surrealists—that the image is a pure creation of the mind

As the image is depicted in the text as analogy, comparison, metaphor, or simile, likewise the element of inter-textuality can be traced in collages. Max Ernst's "La Femme 100 têtes" ["The Woman with 100 Heads" and, by a play on words lost in the translation, "The Woman Without Heads"] is a typical "roman-collage" where the reader is taken, page after page, through a series of collages as mystifying, for the uninitiated, as the automatic texts of Breton (Matthews, 1977, 95–98). Collage's aim is actually the transposition of surrealist textual principles onto the plastic arts because of the immediacy of the visual effect. The more or less conscious assembling of various bits of photographs, newspaper clippings, labels, etc., attempts to destroy the sequentiality of logical reasoning (104). It is akin to destroying the grammar, or the syntax, of language. In fact, it does not stop there: the individual elements of a given collage are the counterparts of lexical items in a text; the spatial arrangement of the bits and pieces are its syntax, and the overall message delivered is its semantic output. Deviation along these three registers is as flagrant in collage as it is in surrealist texts.

The intended effect, a visually-related shock which happens in space rather than in time, and which extends vertically rather than horizontally, stems not only from a stylistic rapprochement of unrelated images but also from a deeply-rooted surrealist conviction that what lies behind the appearances and behind everyday happenings is surreality itself and the inner man:

Tell what is beneath speak
Tell what begins
And polish my eyes which barely catch light

Tell what is beneath the morning beneath the evening
So that I finally get a topographical survey of these pockets external to the
elements and to the reigns
The system of which violates the naive distribution of beings and of things
And gives in broad daylight the secret of their affinities
Of their propensity to avoid each other or to embrace
Like these currents
Which cross each other without touching on maritime charts
(Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 64–65)

The somnambulous/somnolent hunter crosses—at least to surrealist minds—the vast uncharted regions of the inner self and probes the mysterious affinities which link things together. Out of this mysterious hunt, deep into the recesses of being, shines forth the light of the marvellous. It is not an exaggeration to say that the concept of the marvellous, together with

that of rapprochement, form the central hub around which all surrealist thought hovers. The marvellous is of course both the result of rapprochement and at the same time the cause of it, for it is by tapping the resources of automatism that the best rapprochements occur. Likewise, the sense of the marvellous can be externalised when imagination and desire are liberated. Children, whose rational faculties have not yet been fully developed, can sense the marvellous much more easily than do adults, for, in the latter, logical reasoning has taken over. Aragon was painfully aware of the ephemeral duration of the power to marvel at things:

Will I retain for long the feeling of the daily marvellous? I see it losing itself in every man who walks forward in his own life like on a better paved path, who walks forward in the habit of the world with an increasing facility, who strips himself, progressively, of the taste and of the perception of the mysterious.
(Aragon, 1945, 14)

Breton was adamant about this subject: "[T]he marvellous is always beautiful, any marvellous is beautiful, there is only the marvellous that is beautiful" (Breton, *Manifestes*, 24–25). Indeed, it is the "perception of the marvellous that brings forth the greatest part of surrealist works" as Béhar asserts (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 223). Beauty in the surrealist dictionary is thus closely associated with the marvellous, and the last line of Breton's *Nadja* bears these words: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be" (Breton, *Nadja*, 190). Beauty that finds expression in the most far-fetched feasts of rapprochement will be of the convulsive type, when beholding such an image will open up the wells of the inner-self:

At the counter a naked winged woman
Pours the blood in glasses of eclipse
(Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 121)

and

[E]verywhere woman is nothing more than a chalice overflowing with vowels
linked with the unboundable magnolia of the night
(143)

Do these epiphanic moments, where beauty corresponds to some inner presence, indeed make of surrealism such a "radical" movement after all? Or is the Romantic side barely hidden beneath extreme pronouncements? Conversely, is convulsive beauty, as Hal Foster proposes, the symptom, not of love and liberation, but of "traumatic shock, deadly desire, compulsive

repetition" (Foster, 1993, xi)? Foster's characterisation of surrealist beauty as partaking of the "return of the repressed, of the compulsion to repeat" (23) clearly shows what I call the "verticality" of the surrealist image, an image which, by the sheer nature of its repetitiveness, cannot expand in time, sequentially or horizontally, and is bound to live in an a-temporal, non-narrative universe.

Foster's statement that "the surrealists not only are drawn to the return of the repressed but also seek to redirect this return to critical ends" (xvii) also echoes my own statement that repetition will eventually give birth to saturation of a different sort than in dadaism which, as I will show, has no overt critical ends. Is the radicalness of surrealism, then, to be really found solely in its treatment of a deviatory and excessive image?

Surprise, as the above examples show, is the intended outcome of the "marvellous" image produced by rapprochement. Breton was fond of quoting Apollinaire who said that "to depict the fatal character of modern things, surprise is the most modern weapon one can use" (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 37). In fact, Apollinaire's manifesto-programme entitled *L'Esprit Nouveau* contains the following lines on the importance of surprise:

Surprise is our greatest new resource. It is by surprise, by the rank it accords surprise, that the new spirit is distinguished from all previous artistic and literary movements¹⁰...One can start with an everyday subject: for the poet a falling handkerchief can be the lever with which he will raise a whole universe¹¹... (quoted in Nadeau, 1973, 56)

Surprise is not limited to the written text and in fact is the outcome of any marvellous, anywhere: Marcel Duchamp was famous in 1921 for a trick he performed on his friends, among whom was Breton: he used to carry a bird's cage, the bottom of which was lined with what appeared to be sugar cubes. People were asked to carry the cage, and, upon doing so, were surprised by the sheer weight of it. The sugar cubes were in fact chunks of white marble (Breton, *Entretiens*, 163). Here surprise precedes what is marvellous and serves the same purpose: an awareness of how distant images can come together.

But how is the intended surprise to perform its radical role in surrealism? What is the relation between a *moment* which purports to convey a spark of enlightenment, and a *sequence* which is constantly thwarted? Can surprise arise out of a discourse that tries to deny narrative structures? In fact, the Millerian text, as I will show throughout the following part, exhibits qualities which are under-rated in surrealism, viz., a more economic and judicious use of both a *sequence* and a *moment*, an unmarkedness and a

markedness which alternate to produce the desired effects of surprise, shock, deviation, and excess. The narrative will lay the ground for a *sequence* which prepares the reader for the encounter with a moment that disrupts the current flow and brings with it the surprising spark.

Riffaterre thinks that, as a device, surprise is a fundamental aspect of style. A deviation, as mentioned earlier, occurs when differences between marked and unmarked *faits de style* emerge and give shape to a structure. Marked elements most often acquire their peculiar markedness by introducing unpredictable shifts into the unmarked text. Unpredictability thus ensures the survival of stylistic structures, and surprise is the outcome of unpredictability (Riffaterre, 1971, 78). It is the feeling of surprise that spurs the reader to focus on the text being read and on witnessing the *fait de style*. If unpredictability is the mark of the text/author, surprise is often that of the reader. But here we come across the first major difficulty with surrealism. If surprise is so highly praised as a means of access to the "inner world," a by-product of the metaphorical spark, then isn't the whole concept endangered by the mere fact that surprise can only be linked with unpredictability? If such is the case—and it obviously is,—then unpredictability is strongly eroded by repetition and reaches a point where saturation sets in. Saturation is not only a feature of the text itself but also a process and a state experienced by the reader him-/herself. The reader is initially surprised by the unpredictability of the image, but then, through the constant repetition of the same pattern, saturation, the *satiety* of numerous *faits de style*, appears. When saturation sets in, unpredictability disappears and surprise is not generated anymore.

With dada, surprise was produced a little bit differently and, I must say, with a keener eye on the reader's/audience's surprise. The many dadaist spectacles that were given in Zurich, in Paris, and in New York between 1916 and 1920 were all geared towards eliciting a response, most of the time of the scandalised and abused/abusing kind, from the audience (Tzara, 1996, 10). The more vociferous, the more violent the audience, the greater the success for the dadaists. They had succeeded, in their opinion, in shaking their listeners' apathy, even if this meant receiving—and giving—blows and turning the theatre into a giant boxing ring. By mystifying the public, dada was able to return it to a temporary suspended state of *tabula rasa* on which action was possible. The dada audience, by the fact that a *tabula rasa* is created, is ripe for a reshuffling of all accepted notions—and here of accepted metaphorical rapprochements as well. Dickran Tashjian writes with acumen, in his essay "Authentic Spirit of Change: The Poetry of New York Dada," that dada "refused to respect boundaries, spilling over

from one medium to another," thereby "merging the verbal and the visual" (Tashjian, 1996, 267) and reaching a state where the materials of poetry and painting were interchangeably used:

Paradoxically, the antipoetics of nonsense were often intensely poetic in releasing new linguistic and visual possibilities for American writers. From one side, poets saw ways to visualize the verbal; from the other, painters introduced verbal texts among their visual images. Dada brought them together in varying degrees of collaboration. (267)

Two elements are here barely seen: a verbal flow and an image, a sequence and a moment. It is true that the verbal side is poetic—or antipoetic for that matter—and thus alien to narrative sequences, and it is also true that a similar construct was later used by the surrealists, yet the mere fact that dada offers no implicit agenda, caters to no one specific audience, and sees language as a tool against language itself, is enough to place it on a different deviatory plane than surrealism. Everything is surprising and saturation takes a little longer to set in, although it eventually does so.

Matthews argues that the readers, through their surprise at the marvellous nature of the image produced by rapprochement, can let go their reasoning power for a while and enter the world of the inner self. The initial shock leads to the serene acceptance of this new yet omnipresent state of surreality (Matthews, 1991, 41). Matthews here is not aware, it seems, of the stylistic consequence of what he is saying: the "initial shock" is but a means to reach the "omnipresent state of surreality," but then it assumes that if the initial shock fails to do so, then the following ones will be just stale variations on the same pattern. And if the initial shock were enough, why the endless repetitions?

But can humour be seen as an added ingredient in the production of the surrealist state? As grave as such endeavours appear, as serious as Breton assured his readers the aims of surrealism were (Breton, *Manifestes*, 127–130), yet the movement never ossified into a pessimistic or unduly solemn exercise. As early as Alfred Jarry's famous "Merdre" ["shit"] in his play *Ubu Roi*, humour took for the surrealists "grave" importance, if one may say so. Maurice Nadeau, speaking about humour in *Ubu Roi*, stresses:

Humour is the fourth dimension of this world, without it futile and unlivable...A secret conquered at the cost of long suffering, humour is the answer of superior minds to this world in which they feel themselves alien...humour manifests...the heroic attitude of those who are unwilling to compromise. (Nadeau, 1973, 78)

Stylistically speaking, humour acts as a subversive agent on accepted linguistic patterns, proverbs, and clichés and the relentless dissection of words and their transformation into something new (Matthews, 1977, 83). Laughter, along with surprise, accompanies the reader in his/her discoveries of the playfulness of words and the incongruity of the images produced as in this text by Benjamin Péret:

Suddenly, he sprang up while uttering a shriek of terror: the calf was eight metres long and had legs eight centimetres tall. Shaking all over, he cast a furtive glance at the animal: it was now standing up and had a width of three meters. It stuck out a tongue twenty meters long, flat as a piece of paper. At that instant, a formidable gust of wind shook the trees in the boulevard and a dozen similar animals fell to the ground. (quoted in Behar and Carassou, 1984, 350)

Mystery, surprise, and the consequent marvelling at the humour thus produced are all to happen because of chance. Let us recall Lautréamont's famous image:

He is beautiful...like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table between a sewing machine and an umbrella. (Lautréamont, 1973, 233–34)

This sentence in fact contains most of the elements dear to surrealist theory: two items A and B ["sewing machine" and "umbrella"] meet on a given medium ["dissecting table"] through an act of rapprochement ["encounter"] governed by chance ["fortuitous"] and produce a beautiful image ["beautiful"]. Chance here is related to automatism again, though not directly. Automatism, though exhibiting the external signs of arbitrariness and chance, cannot be relegated to the latter one only, for what automatism is supposed to reveal is in fact the world of the inner self which, though possessing a logic very specific to itself, is not haphazard. Chance is better seen as the state which creates or permits favourable conditions to arise (Matthews, 1977, 121). It is the tuning in of the poet's faculties in order to get hold of a moment in time in which the mechanical force of things coincides with the inner workings of the mind. Says Breton: "[Chance] is the encounter of an external causality and an internal finality, a form of manifestation of the external necessity which makes its way in the human unconscious" (quoted in Nadeau, 1973, 223–24). Stylistically speaking, chance is the encounter on a representational medium between a *fait de style* and a reaction of the reader to it strong enough to produce surprise. The *chance* image is here met, half-way, by the *choice* of the reader to recognise it as such.

Chance is not limited, however, to writing or to painting. The surrealists' grand aim, the purpose of which is, as we should recall it, the realisation of the inner self, is to create and to live a life of "startling coincidences" (Nadeau, 1973, 21) where "poetry"—in the surrealist meaning of the word—and life are one. If what happens on a piece of paper—or on a virtual dissecting table—can produce such pleasure and such enlightenment, then how much better if such encounter were to take place in real life, with "real things." Breton was so haunted by the idea that he recalls: "Every night I used to leave wide open the door of the room I had taken at the hotel in the hope of waking up at last near a partner I had not chosen" (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 12). Breton's chance partner, finding herself in his bed by "rapprochement," and ideally not chosen beforehand, is, symbolically, the word/image that the poet/automatic writer does not choose but which yet surprises and delights. Chance is held in such high esteem by the surrealists that it attains cosmic dimensions with Aragon:

Inequality of heights of the passers-by, inequality of mood of matter, everything changes according to laws of divergence, and I wonder a lot about god's imagination: an imagination attached to tiny and discordant variations, as if the big business was to bring together, one day, an orange and a string, a wall and a look. It is as if to God the world is nothing but the occasion to try his hand at some still-lives. He has two or three tricks which he seldom fails to use: the absurd, the bazaar [sic], the commonplace...no way to change his mind. (Aragon, 1945, 59–60)

The chance encounter in everyday life makes the bulk of Breton's *Nadja*. From the first pages, events happen, seemingly haphazardly, but later prove to be essential building blocks of the narrative. Incidentally, it is within this narrative frame that, among other things, the concept of the chance encounter is most effective. It is, therefore, quite interesting to realise that while Breton himself favoured the poetic text, Müller, on the contrary, made the narrative his chief device, thereby pushing the limits of textual deviation a step further. As already mentioned before, a narrative structure expands horizontally, a sequence in time to be interspersed with, here, moments where chance is lucidly experienced. Without the narrative backdrop, poeticity can only work vertically, amassing and piling up the moments of insight. Chance encounter, in a narrative scenario, is much more than a thematic concept; it is a textual construct as well.

Every incident, however trivial, finds a place in the overall scheme of things. For "chance"—because the word has been too bastardised to be ever used seriously,—Breton substitutes the term "hasard objectif" or objective chance. Breton's "hasard objectif" constitutes the "problem of all

problems" in trying to elucidate the relationship between two necessities, overwhelming in their violence: natural necessity and human necessity. How can the two, in appearance irreconcilable, ever meet? Why is the light of recognition, when this event does occur, so blinding? Objective chance, defined as the geometrical place of these coincidences, structures the whole world and, consequently, the act of surrealist writing (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 248), and the relationship between objective chance and volition is the same as that between automatism and conscious writing. To experience automatic writing is to replay or to re-enact the universal "hasard objectif" on a microcosmic scale.

Objective chance and automatism also unite in a typically surrealist manner in the concept of the *objet trouvé*, or *found object*. The rationale is the same: objects, either found in nature or man-made, are objects that operate on a different level from that for which they were originally made. A pebble on the beach, because of an unusual shape, may provoke a rapprochement in the mind of the beholder, accompanied by pleasure, a sense of the marvellous, and an increasing awareness of what has been illuminated, through the rapprochement, in the inner self. A typical such object was created by Giacometti in 1930–1931 and was called "Suspended Ball." The "sculpture"—it was more of an arrangement of pieces glued together—represented a slit ball making contact, along the slot, with an elongated form of the same material. A useless artefact in itself, it possessed the uncanny power of evoking, perhaps through an unconscious sexual image, a feeling of suspense and, more often, of irritation¹². Valentine Hugo created two hands, one white-gloved, the other red, sculpted on a green roulette cloth. Breton himself made his own *objet trouvé*: a receptacle filled with tobacco out of which extended two long almonds. These were placed on a bicycle saddle which was moving against two orange-coloured celluloid antennae. The inimitable Salvador Dalí made a woman's shoe filled, inside, with a glass of warm milk (Chipp, 1968, 425). It is obvious that all these attempts were done in the hope of attaining, in plastic terms, to the purity of the original Lautréamont image.

Summing up the key concepts of surrealism, one may return to the central notion of automatism. Automatism is attained when the mind is freed from the interference of reason. One must, in the words of Apollinaire, "lose in order to find" (quoted in Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 35), and Picasso's famous "Je ne cherche pas, je trouve," exemplifies the surrealists' notion of passive yet dynamic state most favourable to rapprochement. Breton answers his critics thus:

I can only assure you that I don't care about all this and repeat to you:
 Let everything go.
 Let Dada go.
 Let your wife go, let your mistress go.
 Let your hopes and your fears go.
 Sow your children at the edge of a wood.
 Let go the prey for the shadow,
 Let go, if needs be, an easy life, what is offered to you as a future,
 Go on the highways
 (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 110)

A question arises after this brief survey. What is randomness in surrealism? Is it equated with automatism? Does it work, as has been hinted at in the preceding paragraphs, differently from dadaist randomness? On the one hand, dada tries to preclude any sort of raw model which substitutes itself to the existing accepted norms of the language, and indeed does away with the quasi-totality of the linguistic treasury, preserving by the same token the element of unpredictability which springs from a *tabula rasa* state; on the other hand, if any spark is produced it is not directed to any other level in particular, and might lose itself in the surrounding vacuum. Surrealism tries to remedy this situation: its spark is continuous but is in danger of being saturated, while at the same time the spark, if it works on the "initial shock" basis, is re-channelled towards the inner self, the unconscious, to another *reservoir* which recuperates, in a way, the excess energy produced by the metaphor.

As can be seen from this analogy, the reader/audience in dadaism is different from the one in surrealism: the first is left to *create his/her own text*, so to speak, out of the vacuum created, while the second is powerfully, and at times forcibly, directed towards a specific place which is thought to be the origin of all things. Between these two extremes, a median state should obviously exist where a writerly text is written by the reader, a text which offers, however, discreet hints as to possibilities of reading and which caters for the fruitful dissemination of meaning. Such a state is already heralded by the French Symbolists like Lautréamont and Rimbaud and by some surrealist "border cases:" Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* and Breton's *Nadja* exhibit characteristics which make the text a better accomplice of the reader's unpredictable responses and consequent surprise. That these texts are, in their majority, either prose productions or poetic works that admit a certain kind of *narrative structure* is a point worthy of notice. Concomitantly, that the Millerian text is a prose production which has a strong narrative nature and which exhibits, at the same time, those same elements of surprise and unpredictability, will, as I endeavour to show throughout this

study, allow the reader to jump into a temporal existence mirroring the temporality of the text itself.

Another question should be asked: is language, and, more specifically, the surrealist textual production, a valid indicator of the surrealist *faits de style*, or is it one among the other means of achieving the union with the "inner self," clearly the ultimate goal of surrealism, at least in its original conception? Breton stands here again accused of contradiction:

Surrealism...should be considered as existing only because of the *a priori* non-specialisation of its effort. I wish it to have only attempted nothing more than to throw a *conducting thread* between the far too dissociated worlds of wakefulness and sleep, of external and internal reality, of reason and madness, of the calmness of knowledge and love. (Breton, *Les Usages Communicants*, 103-104)

This "conducting thread" might then be any activity taken up in the surrealist spirit, whether it be writing, painting, collage, *objet trouvé*, architecture, or film. This mellowed attitude is also reflected in the first manifesto of 1924 when some leeway was granted to other mediums of expression: "Everything is good in order to obtain from certain associations the desired suddenness" (Breton, *Manifestes*, 53). Again, the appeal to suddenness is fatally threatened by saturation. If suddenness is equated with surprise and unpredictability, then it can only bow down when faced with the ineluctable mechanics of the text and the reader together. Agreeing with Aragon that the "history of a poem is that of its technique" (Aragon, 1974, 13), and recognising, with Mead, the fact that we are still in the infancy of a stylistic description of the surrealist image (Mead, 1978, 8), I will proceed with my presentation of the various elements that make up the surrealist image on the three phonetic/graphemic, syntactic, and semantic registers, keeping an eye, all the while, to areas of similarity and, mostly, of divergence, between this surrealist image and the Millerian one.

NOTES

- 1 In translating these passages, my aim was stylistic exactitude rather than poetic effect. Whenever the need is felt to provide the original French alongside my rendering of it, it will be for phonetic considerations, as in word games, etc. Otherwise, I will only give my translation of the passage.
- 2 See Barthes' concept of the "modern scriptor" mentioned in the introduction.
- 3 One can note that in 1946, with the publication of his second manifesto, Breton writes, in bold letters: "I ASK FOR THE GENUINE, PROFOUND OCCULTATION OF SURREALISM" (Breton, *Manifestes*, 128) and demands the imposition of the alchemical 'Maranatha,' a secrecy charm-cum-curse, on surrealist techniques (127).

- 4 I will come back to this question later on in this part.
- 5 Aragon, however, stressed that dreams should remain dreams and not to be tampered with (Aragon, 1939, 186–87).
- 6 It is this stress on desire and excess, among other things, which differentiates the surrealists from the Romantics, at least the early ones, and which makes the former disrupt the flow of the images in order to reach excess.
- 7 Salvador Dali's "Paranoïa-critique" is an example of such an attitude taken to its extreme.
- 8 Breton was initially trained to become a doctor.
- 9 My example.
- 10 Apollinaire's point is questionable. As early as the Greek tragedians, surprise has been one of the master concepts of literature.
- 11 A famous haiku by Montake: "A falling leaf returning to the branch? It was a butterfly!" (Munier, 1978, 41).
- 12 A response which, it seems, runs against Breton's dictum that surrealism always moves towards pleasure and health, but which comes close to Hal Foster's thesis on the uncanny in surrealism.

Chapter Two

The Phonetic Register

Why would a whole chapter be devoted to a phonetic study of the surrealist image if that same concern will not be as conspicuous a feature in the Millerian text? My answer is that if I intend to situate Miller's text on the spectrum that goes, in one of its aspects, from the Symbolists' belief in "correspondences" between the world of the logos and the "other" world where truth is supposed to shine, to surrealism's play on words which provokes the spark that will—supposedly—ignite the reader's self-knowledge, then such a concern fits in the context of my study. It is only by tracing the development of the status accorded to words that *situational awareness* can be gained. This process will also show the concept of *saturation* at work on the phonetic level, and will help understand Miller's sparse and economical use of phonetic devices. If my reader is overwhelmed with a sense of saturation at the sheer number and variations of phonetico-graphemic stunts, then he/she will all the more appreciate the Millerian text's economical allocation of its own devices. I will therefore present in this chapter only those issues in the phonological make up of French surrealism which are seen as conducive to the production of excessive images. My aim will be to better show later on, by contrast, what the Millerian text, in this specific case, does or does not do in order to reach its own images of excess.

Aragon opens up his *Les Yeux d'Elsa* with the remembrance of how, when he was "at the age when one learns to love poems," he had been struck with these two lines by Rimbaud:

Mais des chansons spirituelles
 Voligent partout les groseilles
 (But spiritual songs
 flutter everywhere the berries)

but he points out that the newer editions of Rimbaud's poetry had the obvious mistake in the second line corrected thus:

voltigent parmi³ les groseilles
[flutter amidst the berries]

To Aragon, though *partout* was a mistake, the verse retained its beauty nonetheless (Aragon, 1974, 9). The word, although incongruous and unintelligible in that context, had acquired, just because of its violation of the norm, a definition of its own, superseding its accepted one, and metamorphosing from an obvious mistake to a stylistic *fait de style*.

Breton thinks that meaning depends not only on the shape of words as much as on their sense, and that there are even words which work against the very idea they were meant to express (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 139). This view of language as having an existence independent of its meaning might seem curious to one unacquainted with the theories of abstract art which flourished at the beginning of this century. Plastic beauty, drifting further and further away from its connotative function, came to be seen by some artists as an end in itself. Fernand Léger stood firm in his conviction that plastic beauty exists in its purest form independently of sentimental, descriptive, or imitative values (Chipp, 1968, 277). The representation of lines and colours would not be in need of referential concepts. Here, the connotative axis gives place to a denotative one: Mondrian's abstractions of colour and shape, for example, by the very purity and scarcity of any outside/external reference, invite the eye to focus on just what it sees, no more. Painting is thus freed from "literature," i.e., from connotative references to ideas, emotions, or personal experiences. By closing the door to any language—not only the discursive one—art is held as art only, the undiluted coming together of line and colour.

The analogy here is instructive. The surrealists, and especially their predecessors the dadaists, tried to liberate the word in a similar fashion. Every word, every syllable, every letter, even, forms a microcosm of meanings (Aragon, 1939, 191) perceived *in situ*, free from the influence of reason. To achieve this, language must first be destroyed and, since it is the lexical material that gives visible form to the structure (Ruffaterre, 1971, 208), it is the word that is attacked first. Breton says:

In the most general meaning of the word, we are called poets because before anything else we attack language, the worst convention. One can very well know the word Hello, and say Goodbye to the woman met again after an absence of a year. (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 66)

The poet, a skilful user of language, has first to prove his/her mastery not by bowing to the words, but, on the contrary, by affirming his/her authority by playing with them as fancifully as possible. The antonyms become equal, the synonyms opposed, for the whole principle of causality is put to doubt. To a movement such as surrealism, it is not enough to voice discontent at the usurped supremacy of reason. One has to challenge this authority by all means if the true functioning of the "inner self" is to be revealed. Matthews says:

[R]easonable language, rationally controlled, cannot reveal how thought really functions. One of the central principles of surrealist doctrine, so far as it touches upon language, is this. Rational supervision of language leads to distortion of thought. Thought is therefore irrational. Its freedom is restored when and where rational controls have been eliminated. (Matthews, 1977, 129)

The destruction of language, then, is in fact seen as a re-construction of it, after the dismembering of the rational force that held it together, depriving it of its full life. The word is thus *liberated* by the writer who also regains his/her full rights. Aragon emphatically describes this double liberation:

[I]t belongs to me to put my hand on a word dishonoured by a centennial usage, calmly, and tell it: Go, my son. Thus I give a very high meaning to style. I give it back its beautiful gown. I give it back its very pure gaze. (Aragon, 1939, 209–210)

Like building blocks, the words are cut, dissected, dismembered, atrophied, amputated, and otherwise manipulated. The possibilities arising from such free-play are infinite (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 322). But is this "infinity" of possibilities really an asset in the building up of the surrealist image? Doesn't it pose problems more than it seeks to solve? It is when such enthusiasm and zest for the apparent freedom and infinity of combinatory possibilities arise that saturation begins to rear its head.

Aragon's "There are words which are mirrors, optical lakes towards which hands move in vain" (Aragon, 1945, 111) is symbolic of the play of words echoing each other but which defy, ultimately, all efforts at rationalisation. This going back to another meaning of the word, or, better to say, to another way of grasping the inherent potential of words, is reflected in so-called primitive societies, where the naming of things and events takes place, according to Breton who wholeheartedly espouses the theory rather uncritically, on a more intuitive plane (Breton, *Entretiens*, 263). The vocabulary does not have to mean anything, for the power of naming acts in an incantatory way to imbue things with dynamic vitality (Lémie &

Sctrick in Rimbaud, 1981, 60). The words jump at us and hit us with the full force of magically charged formulas. The creative leap links mankind with the universe around him/her and with the "inner self" inside. When the connection is established, words become acts of creation, and the "treasures of the invisible unconscious become palpable, leading the tongue directly in one spurt" (quoted in Matthews, 1977, 48). The initiative, for once, is given to the words (Lémie & Sctrick in Rimbaud, 1981, 10) or, better to say, to the "inner self" which, freed from the fear of constantly trying to match the signifier with the signified, can "say what it says" (13).

Dada's views on the subject were, like all other dadaist endeavours, radical. The aim of dada was to reduce the public to pure cretinism first, through the most thought-provoking performances and then, when this public had let go of all traces of prejudice in the form of rationalisation, to take it to its own reconstruction. Destruction, the purest and most complete yet to be seen in the history of literature, is the condition to re-creation (Tzara, 1996, 16). *La Première Aventure Céleste de M. Antipyrine* has for characters Mr. Bleubleu, Mr. Cricri, the Pregnant Woman, Pipi, M. Antipyrine, and others with names no less fantastic. At one point, four characters sing the following:

MR. CRICRI		
THE PREGNANT WOMAN	:	crocrocrocrocrocrocrocro
PIPI		crocrocrocrocrocrocrocro
M. ANTIPYRINE		crocrocrocrocrocrocrocro
		crocrocrocrocrocrocrocro

(31)

The effect of such meaningless repetitions can only have an intense irritating consequence, and a natural reaction of rejection occurs. The mind, numbed by phonetic repetitions, neologisms, and outright absurdities, gives up after a while and, prostrated, is in the desired *tabula rasa* state for dada to act upon. So even if language is absurd—which it really is, according to dada—it has an aim nonetheless (Béhar, 1979, 187–88) in that it paradoxically assumes to lead the self into a re-assessment of reality. Interspersed between the "absurd" lines of the play, glimpses of a dadaist manifesto—interestingly enough, in narrative prose—appear, acted by Tzara himself:

Art was a game, children would assemble together the words with a ringing at the end, then they would shout and cry the stanza, and give it the shoes of dolls and the stanza became queen to die a little, and the queen became whale and the children would run until exhausted. (Tzara, 1996, 34)²

A cacophony of sounds, shouts, and injunctions bewilder the public/reader, indicating that rhythm alone can be the nucleus of poetry and that the awareness of such rhythm is pleasure enough (23). Dada also used rare and/or unknown languages to achieve the same results:

THE PREGNANT WOMAN

Toundi-a-voua
Soco Bgai Affahou
(29)

The dadaist concept of dialogue is thus an exploded version of its everyday counterpart. It is not a means of communicating concepts anymore, but a spontaneous game where each player spurts his/her instinctive and intuitive response to the other's utterance. Language as a tool of exchange, symbolised by dialogue, is denounced. Society, the great evil, schools its citizens in the fine arts of communication and conventions. Dialogue is in fact not an innocent exchange of ideas and feelings but another transaction imposed by society.

Dada wants to "demonetize" language (Tzara, 1996, 11). The same holds true for any other linguistic process. The need to "think well" and to "write and speak well" is overwhelming. Tzara says in one of his manifestoes—in a very "finished" way, it seems: "The bitterest banditry is to finish one's thought sentence" (222).

Letting go is the keyword, as it will be in surrealism. The "great secret" of dada, as divulged by Tzara, is that "thought is made in the mouth" (226) and nothing more. In terms of linguistics, one can say that the communicative function has ceased to apply and has given way to the autic, conative, emotive, and metalinguistic functions (Béhar, 1979, 50). The words just exist for themselves, and any attempt at a paradigmatic function fails, whereas the syntagmatic axis is prioritised. The language is deconstructed (Béhar, 1979, 26). Destructurisation as a concept attains its peak in "Dada's Manifesto on Weak Love and Bitter Love," specifically in the well-known section entitled "To Make a Dadaist Poem"³ (Tzara, 1996, 228–229).

Although most of the early surrealists had first enthusiastically embraced dada and had been fervent dadaists, they soon rebelled against the movement⁴. Breton, especially, had become bored and then exasperated at having to take part in a futile exercise of outcry. To him, dada became barren, with nothing but declamations and phonetic extravaganzas without solid foundations. Certainly, dada aimed at reconstructing man from scratch, but it lacked a programme and was confined to anarchical oratory

ejaculations. By being so violent in its excess, it paradoxically lost its effectiveness, a fate that was to be experienced later by surrealism itself. The war dada was believed to wage on art was too abstract for surrealism even though the dadaist themselves saw their crusade against reason as an endeavour that could be furthered by a specifically dadaist-flavoured art. This posed a methodological problem as well for the surrealists: opposing their writings and then, later, their collages, "objets trouvés," sculptures, and, most essentially, their own paintings, they found themselves not attacking art but only a specific kind of art. Surrealism quickly substituted a *surrealist art*, as witness the numerous local and international "surrealist exhibitions" in 1931, 1938, 1942, 1947, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1965–66, and 1976 (Rosemont, 1978), to a preceding art they despised as bourgeois and decadent.

The theoretical problems and their attending deconstruction are evident in any binary opposition that sets "art" and "non-art" as valid concepts. Turning a somewhat blind eye to the problematics of polar oppositions, Breton, a man of systematic thinking—a virtue, incidentally, abhorred by surrealism—was ready to move on (Nadeau, 1973, 68). The differences between dada and surrealism were deemed to be important ones: dada was oriented towards spectacle, personal provocation, outrage, the communicative, outward experience; surrealism used words to express a *totalité mentale*, to mirror what existed beneath the surface, to show the functioning of the inner self. Dada, with its meaningless words, was bent on destroying man's barriers; surrealism viewed words as the doors to the inner self and also as the doors *out* from the inner self to the external world of their "poetry." Dada's words, when intelligible, were in the shape of aphorisms, maxims, and pronouncements; surrealism's words were those of dreams, myths, and the vast interior continent (Béhar, 1979, 31).

This explains why, contrary to dada, the surrealists did not have a surrealist vocabulary, but had a surrealist *treatment* of that vocabulary (Béhar and Carassou, 1984, 11). "Soco Bgai Affahou" will forever be a sample of dada vocabulary, as well as "zoumbai zoumbai zoumbai Zoug" (Tzara, 1996, 30), whereas surrealism will try to appear more cautious and will also try to define itself in the *way* in which words are used. But to do this, the words must be seen differently in order for the writer to fully grasp the potential in them. To an initial dabbling with words, a kind of "alchemy," there came a more concentrated effort, a "chemistry" of words, as Breton explains:

One began to be wary of words, one suddenly realised that they asked to be treated differently from those small auxiliaries they have always been thought

of...it was a question of liberating them. To the "alchemy of the word" had succeeded a genuine chemistry which first had set itself to show the properties of these words among which only one, meaning, was specified in the dictionary. (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus* 138)

To the dictionary meaning was added one which studied the reactions of words on each other (138). Thus, the words supposedly acquired a double meaning and were given back to life: "The words have stopped playing. The words are making love." (141) was Breton's famous statement. The way in which words "make love" is, of course, through rapprochement. Their coming together is what makes the surrealist's use of lexical items so striking:

The words, the groups of words *which follow each other* practice among themselves the biggest solidarity. It is not up to me to favour these above those others. It is up to a miraculous compensation to intervene—and it does. (Breton, *Manifestes*, 45)

This process of word rapprochement, when translated on the phonetic level, is seen most specifically in the use of parechesis, the repetition of similar sounds in close succession. Mead argues that whereas rhyme, in classical poetry, is based on a process of selection, i.e., on a paradigmatic axis, parechesis happens *in situ*, by a process of combination, of contiguity of linear elements. It happens on the syntagmatic axis (Mead, 1978, 41). Furthermore, Mead points out that the various phonetic devices used deny the existing oppositions between words and thus permit the much-wanted rapprochement (57–58). A sentence like:

Je vous aime, ô beaux hommes vêtus d'opossum
(Desnos, 1953, 39)
[I love you, o beautiful men clad in opossum]

clearly shows the working of parechesis.

It is not easy to see such sentences and accept the idea that they were produced almost unconsciously, under the influence of automatism. Yet, the heyday of such productions coincided with the "sleep" period of surrealism (Desnos, 1953, 14) when the poets, dazed by the discovery of automatism, would produce, phonetically speaking, their most significant pieces.

The concept of objective chance is of significance in the surrealist production of words, for it is the words that function as the building blocks of any linguistic structure. The choice of words, though sometimes it appears haphazard, is determined in a way by the writer's own self, by the

relationship which exists between the chance encounter of the words on the page and the inner non-rational volition of the "scripteur." Thus, the reader, upon encountering surrealist phonetic games, does not know exactly whether to attribute them to a skilful, almost diabolically clever use of the words' possibilities, or to just a haphazard list of vaguely similarly-sounding items. The answer lies, however, in the very root of surrealism, and in its definition as that state which is, at the same time, made up of the day and the night, the conscious and the unconscious, and what lies beyond them.

Although not haphazard, the coming of words on a page (or on any medium for that matter) heavily relies, at least in theory, on chance. The surrealist "jeux collectifs" exemplify—and give shape to—this concept of chance. The famous "cadavre exquis" ["exquisite corpse"] activity took its name from a surrealist game in which the participants would each fill a grammatical slot with a corresponding word without the knowledge of what was written before or of what would follow. The first such collectively constructed sentence was "le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau" (Matthews, 1977, 141–142) ["the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine"] which produced such an effect that the game was called after it. Breton had stretched Lautréamont's injunction that poetry must be made by all, and not by one person only (Lautréamont, 1973, 311), to indicate that the inner self could be fathomed collectively with similar—if not better—results⁵. Breton's initial experiment with Soupault in 1919 was seen as a proof of the well-foundedness of the effort. The principle of pleasure was also translated in these collective games with all the attending associations and bizarre images produced.

Robert Desnos was, among the surrealists, the one most endowed with that peculiar faculty of translating the concepts of automatism, objective chance, mystery, surprise, and pleasure in the way he played with words. Aragon described him when he was seized by the spirit of automatism:

In the café, amidst the sound of voices, the full lighting, the elbowings, Robert Desnos just has to close his eyes, and he talks... Let those who question this formidable sleeper barely prick him and immediately the prediction, the magical tone, that of revelation, that of revolution, the tone of the fanatic and of the apostle spring up... (Desnos, 1953, 15)

Aragon also recalls a "session" with Desnos while in poetic trance:

I remember a waterfall in the depth of grottoes. Someone I knew, a friend called Robert Desnos, was talking. He had regained, through a strange sleep, many secrets lost from all. He was talking. But what is really called talking. He was talking like nobody talks. (Aragon, 1939, 208)⁶

René Bertelé says that "it is not an exaggeration to pretend that everything Desnos has written during a few years represents, in an exemplary way, what surrealism has wanted to be and to do between 1922 and 1930" (Desnos, 1939, 15), and Desnos is, according to Breton, "the most advanced horseman" (15). No doubt he meant the farthest poet in the land of the inner self, the land of the mysterious and of dreams:

All those who witnessed the daily plunges of Desnos into what was really the *unknown* were swept, too, in a sort of dizziness; all were suspended to what he could say, to what he could feverishly trace on the paper. I think, particularly, of these "word games" of a lyrical type completely new, which he was able for a long time to produce at a rhythm that was prodigious... it was in the power shown by Desnos to transport himself at will, instantaneously, from the mediocrity of common everyday life to the fully illuminated and effusive zone of poetry. (Breton, *Entretiens*, 90)

Poetic style and thus poetic value reside in the techniques of word-play: juxtapositions, additions, omissions, and various typographical devices used in profusion by the surrealists, as I will presently show.

Desnos called himself, not without justification, "the lover of homonyms" (Desnos, 1939, 56) for his unsurpassed ability to juggle with words and to create exquisite homophonic similarities. If one knows that Desnos' collection called "Rose Sélavy" (1922–1923) was written in a supposedly telepathic connection with Marcel Duchamp, one can only marvel at the following line by Desnos:

Rose Sélavy connaît bien le marchand du sel
[Rose Sélavy knows the salt merchant well]
(40)

"Le marchand du sel" gives in fact the key to the whole collection of poems under the heading "Rose Sélavy:" if reversed, the sounds yield "Marcel Duchamp:"

marchand du sel => Marcel Duchamp

Marcel Duchamp also becomes a salt merchant, sprinkling the world of poetry with salt, that which gives taste and meaning.

The genius of Desnos, "the most advanced horseman," is undoubtedly shown in his "poem" "L'Asile Ami," a unique masterpiece in that it combines the words of a poem with the accompanied musical notation (Desnos, 1953, 86). One can actually "read" the poem just by looking at the

musical notation, and, reciprocally, translate the poem into its musical equivalent. When one ponders over the fact that there are just seven musical notes, one can only wonder at the dexterity and inventiveness of the poet in this "notational poem" as I would call it.

Desnos' phonetic theory can be summed up in his poem "P'oasis:"

- I see thoughts giving odour to words
- We are the arborescent words that bloom on the paths of cerebral gardens
We give birth to thoughts
- We are the arborescent thoughts that bloom on the paths of cerebral gardens
The words are our slaves
- We are the arborescent letters that bloom on the paths of cerebral gardens
We have no slaves
- We are the arborescences that bloom in the deserts of cerebral gardens.
(68-69)

Do thoughts give "odour" to words, or do words give birth to thought? Are words the slaves of thoughts? Along the "cerebral gardens" bloom many arborescences: thoughts (semantic register, the signified); words (morphemic register, the signifier and the bridge to the signified); and letters (phonetic register, also a signifier). The endless battle is futile, it seems, for all share in peopling the otherwise deserted cerebral landscape with images.

Marcel Duchamp was the other avant-garde poet and artist who excelled in word games. Breton described his technique as exhibiting "mathematical rigour" (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 140), as the following examples show:

Rose Selavy et moi esquivons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis.
[Rose Selavy and I dodge the ecchymoses of Eskimos with exquisite words]
(Behar and Carassou, 1984, 320)

Roger Vitrac favoured similar games of homophonic similarity or paronomasia:

L'air des cimes est le lait des crimes
(Behar and Carassou, 1984, 324)
[The air of peaks is the milk of crimes]

Words, then, as they are used in everyday exchange and in literature, are seen by surrealists as a burden more than as a help. Not being afraid of

"moving" these words around will uncover new possibilities. This is illustrated in Breton's famous poem "Fata Morgana:"

There exists some embarrassing furniture, the role of which is to hide exits
On the other side who knows the magnified barge we could leave together

There exists some furniture heavier than if filled with sand at the bottom of the
sea
Against these, lever-words would be needed
(Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 36-37)

The "lever-words" which can unlock the doors to the "other side," to the world of the "inner self."

To conclude this enumeration of stylistic phonetic manipulations, it is fitting to mention the many typographical devices used by the surrealists to achieve their goals of surprise through rapprochement, especially since, as I will show with the Millerian text, such devices are there utterly absent, confirming my initial thesis that the surrealists' enthusiasm for rapprochement quite spilled over and reached, by this very token, a degree of repetition and saturation which worked, in the end, towards the annihilation of the intended effect altogether. Aragon uses, in his *Le Paysan de Paris*, a plethora of "affiches," "coupures de journaux," "annonces," "pancartes," "feuilles bimensuelles," "appels," and other such graphical devices. These are interspersed in the text so naturally that the reader cannot help but think that without them the book would be incomplete. Likewise, Breton devotes three pages of his first manifesto to typographical renderings of newspaper cuts to highlight the work of chance.

However, the sheer mass of surrealist word games and the apparent simplicity of their production does indeed detract from the seriousness and/or the poetic value of such exercises. The game, once mastered, turned out to be detrimental to the players, as Roger Shattuck, in his introduction to Nadeau's *The History of Surrealism*, explains:

I am inclined to think that the techniques of composition tried out or refurbished by the surrealists served a reasonable purpose, though not the one they put forward. Automatic writing, collaborations, experiments with random assemblages, simulations of paranoid states, dream journals, party games—all these means shovelled out into the open a vast quantity of raw material...It was a useful mistake to believe that these materials were worth publishing or exhibiting *tel quel*. Without them surrealism could never have commanded so much attention, but most these unretouched works relied on a shock of surprise that perished in monotony or obscure topicality. (Nadeau, 1973, 27)

It is very true that Desnos and Duchamp presented their word games *tel quel* as did, also, to a lesser extent, Breton. A major flaw alluded to by Shattuck is the “monotony” which soon replaced surprise. It is a stylistic fact that the *faits de style* which make up the marked elements of a style can only remain “marked” as long as they contrast with corresponding “unmarked” elements of the structure. Saturation endangers the status of markedness of the *faits de style*. To repeat the definition of saturation, every repetition of a marked element, if successive and contained within the memory span of the architecteur, decreases the stylistic potential of the text (Riffaterre, 1971, 13, 136). A marked *fait*, when repeated to saturation, is automatically levelled (“nivellement”) (87) and loses thus its markedness. A surrealist poem which would rely solely on word games and/or on typographical features would very easily—and quicker than one might expect—reach for the reader the threshold of saturation and revert to an unmarked state.

Another criticism of the surrealists’ stance towards words is the classic mistake of trying to go back to a so-called “primitive” language, when “simple” man would “name” things as they appear. The philosophical problems inherent in this approach are too numerous to enumerate; the whole idea of the “original man” as well as that of the “original poet” having been subtly problematized by Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*. It should have been clear to the surrealists that the state of the language they were attacking was initially—in their view of things—the result of an initial “naming” by their remote ancestors. Likewise, any new “naming” done at a specific time will inevitably have as a future consequence the imposition of such rationalisations which will again be decried.

Words in isolation do exist, but they do not make structures. Therefore, the lexical register, though crucial and functioning as a building block through which structure appears, is only second in importance to syntax (Riffaterre, 1971, 17). The way in which the phonological and morphological units I have just analysed combine with each other to form the syntactic register will be the main concern of the following chapter. Again, my concern is ultimately geared towards situating the Millerian text in terms of opposition or at least in terms of contradistinction to the surrealist image. The all-too-numerous efforts engineered by surrealists in order to achieve their aims are contrasted with the deceptively easy-going and carefree text of Miller.

NOTES

- 1 My italicising.
The translation cannot faithfully render the original with its pun and play on words.
- 2 Henri Behar, in his introduction to *Dada est Taton, tout est Dada*, simultaneously sees this recipe as Tzara’s attempt at introducing chance in writing and as a form of dadaist humour (Tzara, 1996, 16).
- 3 The definitive and official break occurred in 1922.
- 4 An idea to be found in Jung’s collective unconscious theory.
- 5 The similarity with Henry Miller is here striking. The difference in the “setting up” of the automatic effect is, likewise, no less striking, as will be shown later on.

Chapter Three

The Syntactic Register

As we move one step further away from pure phonetic concerns, we begin to lay the ground for a more thorough understanding of the similarities and differences which exist between the surrealist and the Millerian texts. This is also where the Millerian critic begins to tread on stabler grounds because excess and its means are apprehended one step away from phonetic devices and word games. Here again, the way the French surrealists and their predecessors come to terms with problems of syntactic structure is conducive to a better reading of all the texts involved in this study.

Early in the 20th century, the Futurists were laying the bases for a dynamic theory of structure. Empowered by their idea of movement, speed, and reckless energy divorced from any rational context, they posited that every object "reveals by its lines how it would resolve itself were it to follow the tendencies of its forces" (quoted in Chipp, 1968, 296). Translated into a stylistic context, every word, by its intrinsic "lines," or phonetic properties, and by its relationship with other "objects," or words, resolves itself in a dynamic syntactic structure. If this is true, then what we, as readers first, and as stylisticians and critics second, experience while reading dada and surrealist texts, should be re-evaluated under the light of syntactic lines of energy or, put stylistically, of syntactic *faits de style*.

Dada is not satisfied with exploding the lexical register of language only as was shown in the preceding chapter. To accentuate its aim of creation, through destruction, dada intervenes on the syntax (Tzara, 1996, 352). But dada is not unduly concerned about the syntactic effects of its productions. The syntax, if any, is seen as a *pis-aller*, a very dispensable structure that can crumble at any time. The shaking/shocking effect produced is what really matters. But even then, a lack of syntactic structure is itself a kind of structure, a "not-syntax," a fact clearly verifiable by the assertion that a dada "poem" is easily recognisable, not only by its use of the lexicon, but also by its a-structured form. Béhar talks about a "new syntax" similar to that used

in cinematic productions (Béhar, 1979, 28–29). This is shown in surrealist-influenced movies, and in Henry Miller himself when he wrote "Scenario," his strikingly surrealist cinematic script¹.

Aragon painstakingly asserts that syntactical faults or mistakes are completely different from syntactical errors (Aragon, 1939, 27). Mistakes are made, inadvertently or not, and they are elastic enough to permit a sometimes humorous play with tenses, prepositions, etc. without being errors. Errors, to Aragon, are correctable, and betray ignorance more than play. A poet is given all license to make mistakes, though it is hard to find him/her committing errors of syntax. Syntax is not a pure entity that is to be worshipped. It is there to be moulded and metamorphosed according to the whims of the writer:

Me, I trample. Syntax, it is trampled. This is the difference between syntax and me. I don't trample syntax just for the pleasure of trampling it or for trampling anything...I trample syntax because it has to be trampled. It is grapes. (Aragon, 1939, 28)

Besides giving the poet license to do whatever the fancy of the moment's intuition, "trampling" the syntax plays a crucial role on the road to the reader's enlightenment. If we remember Breton's dictum "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be" (Breton, *Nadja*, 190), then Aragon's aim is clear:

The art of versification is the alchemy that transforms weaknesses into beauties...Where syntax is violated, where the word disappoints the lyrical movement, where the sentence is constructed wrong, there, as many times, the reader shudders. Who then said that poetry stops where in the lines appears inversion? (Aragon, 1974, 9–10)

The indispensable surprise, again, that is to jolt the reader into knowledge.

How can syntax, however, be of service to dadaists and surrealists alike? What are the intricate mechanisms which, when put into dextrous hands, can release the promised energy? In Tzara's *Deuxième Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*, six characters at one time all utter one single word: "Arbre" ["Tree"] (Tzara, 1996, 103). However, dada is shocking even in its nonconformity to a specific syntactic make up. The last part of the "Dada manifesto on Weak Love and Bitter Love" is made up of the verb "scream" repeated 275 times in 25 lines with the 26th containing the words "Who still finds himself/herself/itself very cute" (235).

A slightly different freedom with structure—expressed by Aragon earlier—pervades surrealism. Words, by virtue of the surrealist philosophy

of immanence (Matthews, 1977, 23), are free to "make love" in any possible combination: phonetico-morphemic license is extended, as naturally as possible, to the syntax, and the mundane view of poetry as a skilful and regulated endeavour (prosody) is to be relentlessly avoided in favour of the unfettered expressiveness of the inner self (25).

The concept of rapprochement is clearly evinced in surrealist syntax. The encounter of words happens within a broader context of syntactic rapprochement: the structure is the "table" on which the sewing machine and the umbrella can meet. It does not matter whether the syntactic "scaffolding," so to speak, is regular or not, it is sufficient for it to sustain the image for the fraction of an instant necessary for the rapprochement to strike.

The intended effect of such syntactic shuffling is to dissect the structure of the language and thus to bring forth to the reader's consciousness the ephemeral or illusory nature of structures themselves. This kind of "deconstruction" is also found in a poem by Tzara entitled "Ange" ['Angel']

colour recomposes itself	flows between the spaces
the liquid hanged men	sway rainbow
the worms of light in	there where our durations are
the steam	visible

(Tzara, 1996, 154)

The "poem" can be read equally horizontally, as in the normal way, or vertically: "colour recomposes itself [.] flows between the spaces [.] the liquid hanged men sway rainbow" or "colour recomposes itself [.] the liquid hanged men [.] the worms of light in the steam." The poem is thus not only exploded as a robust and durable structure, but it also doubles itself, through the syntactic gap created, into a multi-meaning, or polysemous, product. The concept of rapprochement, even though not central to dada, is nevertheless obvious in this poem. The encounter is open-ended, and is left to the discretion of the reader to experience.

It is also notable that, even if one takes the "Ange" piece, the internal syntactic make up of the individual lines is faultless: "colour recomposes itself," "flows between the space," "the liquid hanged men," all exhibit perfect syntax. According to Mead, syntactic regularity serves as a kind of framework for the phonetic/morphemic and semantic ambiguities of the text. A strong syntactic structure provides control (Mead, 1978, 66). It is so regular, at times, that it may become "banal" and "clumsy" (64),

supremely exemplified in Breton's most famous poem, "L'Union Libre" ["The Free Union"]:

My wife with the hair of woodfire
With the thoughts of lightnings of heat
With the waist of hourglass

(Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 93)

The sixty lines that form the poem repeat with perfect regularity an NP + de ["with"] + NP construction, and it is the role of this "banal" and repetitive structure to hold the poem together and prevent it from sinking into semantic unintelligibility (Mead, 1978, 101–103). Mead notes that when contextual feature compatibility is at its most difficult to interpret, syntactic regularity is ready to provide a stable structure for the poem to unfold (66). It is also of interest to note that the poem is, to an overwhelming degree, composed of nouns and the only verbal forms allowed are non-finite ones (infinitives and past participles), thus providing a photograph-like picture of the woman in question² and re-enforcing again my contention that what is aimed at in surrealism is less a narrative discourse than a vertical *moment* divorced from horizontal movement:

[D]eclaration is a nominal function, description is an adjectival function, and narration is a verbal function...Breton's portrait in 'L'Union Libre' is essentially a *declarative* one. Concerning the 'femme,' the poem states not that certain things happen in a certain way, nor that they appear in a certain way, shape, colour, size, and so forth, but simply that certain things are, that they *exist*. (Mead, 1978, 103)

Other stylistic devices that surrealists use to bring forth rapprochement include "syntactic synonyms" where parallel syntactic structures are produced (Mead, 1978, 108–109). The best example of syntactic synonyms is the poem "L'Union Libre" where, as noted above, not only is the structure regular, but the repetition of the same pattern automatically and wilfully creates a syntactic rapprochement between each line. The more syntactically parallel lines there are, the more "rapprochées" the images are and the stronger the effect. Syntactic parallelism boosts the rapprochement device *ad infinitum*.

Mead also sees any rapprochement created by means of prepositions as a relatively weak device, since the elements of the image, instead of being integrated seamlessly, are just added up one after the other sequentially on the page. These models are less conducive to surprise and thus to the production of the surrealist spark (Mead, 1978, 88). I fully agree with

Mead's contention which again supports my assumption about the *verticality* of the surrealist image.

A better example of syntactic integration is seen by Mead in relativisation, in an example from *Les Champs Magnétiques*:

The detachable collar which is in some way the mouth of these shells gives way to a big golden pincer which seizes when one doesn't look at it the most beautiful reflections in the shop window. (quoted in Mead, 1978, 76)³

Such a complex sentence, built on a matrix ("The detachable collar gives way to a big golden pincer") and three subordinate clauses, is more apt to create the desired *rapprochement*, always according to Mead, because of its embedding nature. Here, no addition is being made, but a "progressive accumulation" where each element opens up, so to speak, into other elements (77) in the fashion of dolls that contain other dolls inside. The effect of surprise is thus increased.

Unfortunately, relative constructions are, in surrealist productions, not as frequent as Mead would have the reader believe, and are certainly, statistically speaking, less obvious than prepositional constructs. Moreover, the surrealist image is initially based—whether with fruitful results or not on surprise and the immediacy of vision. Relative constructions are simply too long and cannot provide the fulguration of the desired spark.

Furthermore, relativisation is more "rational" in that the intellect has to work harder to keep the different elements of the embedded relative clause(s) with the main matrix. Such effect, both on the rational and on the stylistic levels, is anathema to surrealism *per se*, even if surrealists occasionally resorted to it. Indeed, the element of *time* is very relevant here. If prepositions seem to work as an effective device towards the *rapprochement* effect, relative constructions *slow down* the expected response of the reader who, one has to remember, is hampered by the limits of textual memory. This is not to be taken, however, as a sign of the sequentiality necessary for the effects of deviation to occur. Even though relative structures do provide the narrative with a movement in time that can be fruitfully employed as the background against which the *moment* of surprise strikes, yet not all non-poetic structures afford such opportunities. That this situation is appraised by Miller who uses prose rather than poetry, and who therefore constantly faces the pitfalls of relativisation, is a tribute to his economical treatment of stylistic devices.

I will end this chapter by asking a question: if chance is a decisive factor in the appearance of words, and if some kind of syntactic regularity—at least with surrealism—with a preference for NPs and PPs is the trademark

of surrealist morphology and syntax, can computer-generated sentences deceive the reader into confusing those with surrealist productions? Does chance play such a decisive role in the Millerian text, and is Miller's contribution to the imagery of excess precisely the non-abandonment, the resistance, to a flow that carries everything with it? Hinez Hedges proposes, at the end of her *Languages of Revolt* (1983), a computer software that automatically generates words and combines them in surrealist-like fashion. How would surrealists cope with such a concept? Would it not deal the death-blow to automatism and randomness and deprive it of the human element and thus of the "inner man" view? What would be, to an external reader, the difference between pages and pages of computer-generated texts and pages and pages of Breton-Soupault automatic texts? It is obvious that the difference would be perceived only by the writers themselves, who would also recognise the idiosyncratic elements present in their comrades' production. But again, how would an external reader, *not trained* in automatic writing, recognise the computer text from the human text?

A possible answer would be that it is not important *who* or *what* produced the text as long as the reader is able to detect sparks of *rapprochement* that will inevitably make it even in the computer text. Does that answer invalidate my initial theory that the surrealist reader is faced with a readerly, and not a writerly text? Will the surrealist text, thus, have achieved pure reader-response value? Unfortunately, the existence, to the surrealists, of another world to be reached through the spark produced endangers the whole framework of the writerly hypothesis. If the images are just spark-signals to something lying beyond, then the reader is invited not to re-write his/her own text but to try and *fit* what he/she reads onto what is initially posited as having surrealist value. If the *fitting/matching* process does not prove fruitful, then the reader will not have managed to achieve surrealist awareness.

But let us go on and explore how the surrealists justify the recourse to what lies beyond—and alongside—the excess: the message, the land to discover, the myths to explore, the "inner self" to experience. Riffaterre would heartily agree, at least from a methodological point, for to base the analysis on the grammar only is to run the risk of attributing permanent stylistic value to purely linguistic elements which might have coincided with a *fait de style* (Riffaterre, 1871, 106). Thus it is only legitimate to continue this stylistic study with the semantic aspect of the surrealist image.

NOTES

1. It is interesting to note that "Scenario," although it purports to be surrealistic in style, is in fact a tightly woven temporal narrative which, in purely Millerian fashion, is interspersed with "bursts" of moments that interrupt the horizontal flow of temporality.
2. I will talk in more detail about the implications created in this poem to a gendered reading in the chapter on the semantic register.
3. My translation.

Chapter Four

The Semantic Register

In this chapter I propose to explore in more detail the way in which the excess of meaning is constructed in French surrealism. I will show how semantic features, in the surrealist image, gravitate around what I perceive to have been the "lost" element in the incessant search for a metaphorical interpretation of that image, the *ground*. My main critical concern will be, however, to show that as we read in sequence, images are eventually *piled up* vertically and not horizontally, a factor that helps, ultimately, to increase the saturation factor. It will be clear that poetry, when combined with an excessive use of deviation-producing techniques, is more liable to fall into the dreaded saturation pattern since it is more difficult to recognise *anchoring* points such as a narrative structure and the intermittent return to less deviatory stylistic devices. Ultimately, it will be clear that the Millerian text avoids such saturation through its narrative discourse.

Again, on a spectrum beginning with the Symbolists, surrealism is most prone to the dangers detailed above since it shuns description and narratives and favours total reliance on spark-producing images. Thematic concerns, which I will be exploring here, lend a helping hand that prevents surrealism from falling altogether into unintelligibility. The model I present can be seen as both a way of describing, as succinctly as possible, the surrealist image of excess, and also as a way of showing the *predictability* of such an image, its possible *reduplication*—which Hinez Hedges implicitly does with her computer-generated programme,—and its ultimate readerliness.

Lautréamont's famous encounter on a dissecting table between a sewing machine and an umbrella will serve as a starting point in our investigation of the semantic nature of the surrealist image. Have these two elements, the sewing machine and the umbrella, the "right" to meet on such a table? Matthews thinks that

He [Lautréamont] brought together two objective forms, familiar to us all. In themselves, these forms, immediately identifiable from daily experience, seem to

have no appeal outside the limits of practical utility. Hence emotion enters the word picture only where the third figurative element, a dissecting table, calls forth feelings that may range all the way from a mild sensation of disturbance to downright terror. The emotions liberated by the presence of the table do nothing, of course, to explain or justify in commonsense terms why a sewing machine and an umbrella should be meeting at all. In fact, it is more likely to heighten than diminish the impression recorded in the reasoning mind that the encounter we are witnessing is gratuitous, devoid of meaning, even. (Matthews, 1977, 23)

Reason, as always with the dadaists and the surrealists, is the culprit, and the obstacle to cross if the reader is to enjoy to the full the effect of rapprochement. The yardstick with which to value poetry is neither reason nor sensibility but pure freedom of association. Lautréamont says, in his *Les Chants de Maldoror*, that his poetry is the ultimate proof that received opinions can be despised, and that his hero, Maldoror, is free to resound the voice of his "terrible will" (Lautréamont, 1973, 160). Whether the stylistic effect violently strikes the reader or not is a matter of indifference to Lautréamont. The inner self, believed to be naked, unmasked, unfettered by rational systems, is thought to be revealed in the chaos of emotions and desires clashing against each other and against the rigid structure of society. Reading *Les Chants de Maldoror* is supposed to give just such an impression of "gratuitous" images popping up and encountering each other for the flash of a moment and then disappearing as quickly as they emerged. Semantic "incongruities" reflect the workings of the Lautréamontian inner self. In a fascinating display of enumerating skill, Lautréamont sarcastically establishes his own "measure" of what is acceptable, stylistically, and what not:

[W]hat is somnambular, suspect, nocturnal, somniferous, noctambulous, viscous, speaking like seals, equivocal, pulmonary, spasmodic, aphrodisiac, anaemic, one-eyed, hermaphrodite, bastard, albinos, pederastic...in front of these disgusting charnel houses, which I blush to enumerate, it is time to react at last against what shocks us and bends us so powerfully. (282-83)

More than a hundred NP constructions (in the complete passage) centre around a semantic constant, in this case, everything that is filthy, nauseating, unsound, unnatural, disease-like, and evil. The very last line comes as a shock and undermines what precedes.

Inez Hedges' application of cognitive frame theory provides her with a model capable of explaining what is happening, semantically, in the dadaist and surrealist texts. Reading events are usually circumscribed within a cognitive frame of semantic expectations. When new experiences are

encountered, the reader tries to situate them in a "replacement frame" which would be neither too similar to the initial frame nor too dissimilar as to prevent any frame-making process (Hedges, 1983, 36-38). The essence of Hedges' assumption is that dada begins by frame-breaking but stops there while surrealism, also beginning with frame-breaking, continues with frame-making. I believe that neither strategies yields, in the long run, tangible results as far as the reader is concerned: with dada, the frame is broken and the reader is faced with a *tabula rasa* which he/she has to write again, apparently, out of scratch. The challenge, to say the least, is formidable. With surrealism, the frame is first broken and is then rebuilt according to the dictates and principles of the school which are identified with those of the "inner man" concept itself. But such a frame is rapidly assimilated, especially when saturation sets in, into another "normal" frame. What was initially achieved is short-lived. With the Millerian text, however, frames are continuously broken and built and broken again through a strategically-minded technique which very effectively allocates the peaks and troughs of such a dialectic movement. The reader's cognitive processes are constantly challenged and *tinkled* by a text which prolongs the *pleasure* of hesitation, indeterminacy, and undecidability. The economical uses of excess show Miller's exploitation of the best of both schools, and it is here that Miller's apparent links with dada and surrealism are explained.

In this context, the semantic shift towards excess is best exemplified in Alfred Jarry's use of scatological words which will be admirably mirrored in Miller's "turd episode" later on in this study. The French writer's play, *Ubu Roi* shocked, as I have mentioned earlier, the whole French nation on Dec. 10, 1896 when the opening line was an unambiguous "Merdre" ["Shit"]. The public was outraged at such an attack against what they thought "the beautiful language of the theatre" (Béhar, 1979, 69). But they were less horrified by the word itself—one of the most common swear-words in French—than by the implications an acceptance of it would entail. If a play could begin by "Shit," then anything would be permitted. French plays, with their rigid rules and elevated use of the language, epitomised what was sacred and immovable in literature. "Shit" was not an isolated, harmless word that would disappear and be forgotten. It was seen as the war-cry of a new generation of writers who demanded that their productions be liberated from the fetters of conventionality and reason. Doubt is a phonetic, syntactic, and especially a semantic characteristic of dada writings where the undecidability of phenomena is not towards a *resolution* of different elements, as was planned in the first surrealist manifesto:

A priori, which is, with closed eyes, Dada places *Doubt* above everything and above action. DADA doubts everything . . . Don't trust Dada . . .
 The normal state of man is DADA
 But the real dasas are against DADA.
 (Tzara, 1996, 227)

Such circular movements, such *muse en abîme*, a centre with a centre with a centre *ad infinitum*—and, at times, *ad nauseam* as well, or definitions which are not definitions, betray a concern with meanings that go beyond accepted meaning, with the semantic metamorphosis of given facts. Pablo Picasso was once musing about an “object trouvé” he had constructed: bicycle handle bars and a seat transformed into a bull’s head. Would it be possible that, out of his bull’s head, one day, one could construct bicycle handle bars? The object would have undergone a double metamorphosis (Chipp, 1968, 273–74), travelling, as it were, through the artist’s medium, from a bicycle bar to a bull’s head to a bicycle bar again. Octavio Paz comments: “The poem...offers itself as a circle or a sphere: something that is closed on itself, a self-sufficient universe in which the end is also a beginning that returns, is repeated and re-created” (quoted in Matthews, 1977, 98). In this orobouros-like circle, the shape, by necessity more or less regular, encloses the sparks of creation and the free play of ideas. Syntactic “near regularity” encloses semantic free play. When reality is no longer given as absolute, and when the poem or the text acts as a self-sufficient entity, the self finds meaning wherever it may (Clifford, 1988, 119).

I have remarked earlier on Riffaterre’s concept of deviation and how the “extended metaphor,” to him, would explain the process of this deviation in surrealism. I have also commented on this stylistic model suggesting that although it could explain a few surrealist productions which would have to be very short, it could not account for longer texts and, with extremely short poems/texts/sentences of one to three lines it falls short of giving a reasonable explanation of the process. Mead concurs with my criticism but from another angle. He considers that Riffaterre, instead of thinking in terms of “compatibility” for an extended metaphor is nothing else but variations on the tenor by different and superficially misleading vehicles where compatibility is present on the deep level. He should have devised a model that would account for incompatibilities as well (Mead, 1978, 123–24), and shown how these incompatible sets come together and the condition of their doing so. Mead also attacks Todorov’s model of anomaly classification, where Todorov posits that semantic anomalies fall into three main groups:

1. Combinatory anomalies where contextual and selectional restrictions are flouted. Ex.: “A *green* murder” where *green* has the feature “material” and *murder* has the feature “non-material.”
2. Logical anomalies where pure logical fallacies are committed. Ex.: “This round table is square.”
3. Referential anomalies where the anomaly either stems from impossible situations or from nonexistent ones. Ex.: “The warm blood of bees is kept in mineral water bottles.” (Mead, 1978, 124–126)

Todorov’s approach, in this context, is diametrically opposed to that of Riffaterre in that it pursues issues of *incompatibilities* only (Mead, 1978, 126). Mead, predictably, favours a middle approach:

The sequence is neither an anomaly nor a metaphoric relationship, but a complicated structure of compatibilities and incompatibilities...the most important component of this combined model will be the incorporation of both the compatible and incompatible conditions that are found in the image... (128)

The image is thus the relationship between a specific context working in a compatibility mode with another context, and the same contexts in an incompatibility mode as well. The relationship between the two would give the key, according to Mead, to the semantic nature of the image produced. The semantic encounter in the surrealist image is thus the relationship between compatible and incompatible features of segments (119).

Mead’s approach is a tidy way of expressing the issue from the angle of similarities. On the one hand, the concept of the image being the relationship between compatible and incompatible contexts is intrinsic to Riffaterre’s theory of the structure being essentially the relationship between marked and unmarked *fais de style*, the incompatibility issue, on the other hand, benefits enormously from Todorov’s classification and the setting up of features violations which include, by the very nature of the approach, both compatibilities, both sets heavily used by Mead.

However, it seems that Todorov and Mead—and Riffaterre to a lesser extent, specifically in his treatment of the surrealist image—have judiciously ignored—or just simply forgotten—the metaphor’s third element, so crucial to any semantic analysis of the surrealist image. The metaphor, defined simply as “one field of reference—carried over or transferred into another” (Clifford, 1987, 23)—is made of a *tenor*—the principal subject or topic,—the *vehicle*—the analogue—and the *ground*—the context and motivation of the comparison (24). By disregarding the *ground* element of the metaphor, Mead has disregarded surrealism’s semantic key to the production of the text. I will endeavour to produce a model that will account for these

three elements of the metaphor—and for other image-producing/image-enhancing devices—that eventually make up the surrealist image, for the metaphor and the comparison, whether one wants it or not, are the doors to surrealist semantic difficulties and excess. This model is also extremely relevant in that it will serve later on to define the Millerian image/metaphor in terms of similarities and differences.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the word “comme” [“like”] is seen by Breton and most of the other surrealists as the most effective way of inducing the shock, surprise, pleasure, and consequent knowledge resulting from an automatic—or, at least, from a semi-automatic—semantic rapprochement.

The unchallenged master of “comme” rapprochements, however, is undoubtedly Lautréamont, the idol of the surrealists who, after successively applauding and then vilifying many a writer and poet, have unflinchingly upheld Lautréamont's genius. His “Beau comme” [“Beautiful like”] constructions have never been equalled.

1. He is beautiful like the retractability of the claws of birds of prey; or also like the uncertainty of the muscular movement in wounds of the soft parts of the posterior cervical region...and, above all, like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table between a sewing machine and an umbrella.
(Lautréamont, 1973, 233–234)

2. Beautiful like the congenital defect of conformation of man's sexual organs, consisting in the relative brevity of the urethra canal and in the division or absence of its inferior wall, in a way that this canal opens up at a variable distance of the glans and below the penis.
(246)

3. The Virginia Grand-Duke, beautiful like a memoir on the curve performed by a dog running behind its master, slid in the crevices of a ruined convent. (198)

4. The lamb vulture, beautiful like the law governing the stopping of the development of the chest in adults, the propensity to growth of which is not related to the quantity of molecules assimilated by their organism, was lost in the high strata of the atmosphere.
(198)

5. The scarab, beautiful like the trembling of the hands in alcoholism, was disappearing over the horizon.
(199)

6. [H]e seemed to me beautiful like the two long tentacular filaments of an insect, or rather, like a rushed inhumation; or also like the law governing the

reconstitution of mutilated organs; and, above all, like an eminently putrefying liquid!
(195)²

In the above examples, beauty is equated with *sememes* not ordinarily associated with it. A pressing question arises, then: what is “beauty” doing there, if it was not “meant” to be, in the first place? The surrealist answer would be that it is *precisely* because “beauty” is not commonly associated with such imagery that the “spark” is at its best. Indeed, the second element of the comparison falls on either of the following:

- a. Birds of prey (the Virginia Grand-Duke) or vultures and their attributes (the vulture, the claws)
- b. Insect-like attributes (the tentacular filaments)
- c. Animals or their attributes (the dog's curve, the scarab)
- d. Physiological and natural processes and “laws” (sexual organs, the development of the chest, the trembling of the hands, the uncertainty of the muscular movements, the inhumation, the reconstitution of mutilated organs, putrefying liquid)
- e. Objects-encounter (the sewing machine, the umbrella, and the dissecting table).

What all these elements have in common is the almost cold, detached, inhuman impression associated with them. Even in the case of the dog, it is only the memoir on its running curve that is of importance. Beauty is stripped of all its sentimental and affective connotations but, even then, the second element of the comparison is alive with movement: the claws are retractable, the wounds in the brain exhibit “uncertain” muscular twitches, the filaments are tentacular, the inhumation is rushed, the liquid is fermenting with putrefaction, the hands are shaking, the mutilated organs are again, the dog is running in a curve, the chest stops to grow but is entered by the assimilation of molecules in the organism, the urethra opens up, and even the sewing machine and the umbrella are potentially functioning. Beauty thus is at the same time mechanical, subjected to immutable laws and scientific observation, and full of throbbing life. Stripped of the vagaries of human feelings, beauty is elevated from the realm of the transient to that of the absolute³.

To Hal Foster, surrealist beauty is closely related to the Freudian concept of the “uncanny” and its effect, anxiety (Foster, 1993, 7). Semantically speaking, it is true that most of the “beau” examples are associated with the “return of a familiar phenomenon...made strange by repression” (7): the claws of birds of prey, the muscular movements in the wounds, the dissecting table, the congenital defects in sexual organs, the

ruined convent, the trembling of the hands, the mutilated organs, the rushed inhumation with its attending risks, and putrefaction.

Stylistically, the above examples show features neither of compatibility (Riffaterre), nor of incompatibility (Todorov), nor even one of relationship between the two (Mead). In 5, the scarab's beauty is likened to the trembling of the hands in alcoholism, and thus:

1. It is the scarab's *beauty* that is compared to the trembling of the hands, so that any compatibility is ruled out;
2. Even if we agree with Todorov in seeing in the image a referential anomaly, yet the recurrence of the same type of analogy in most of the other examples is sufficient to point out to a common model with common elements;
3. Mead's model of a relationship between compatible and incompatible segments would reveal little in terms of a structure that could be either recognisable or reduplicable at will.

The "as beautiful as" construction in fact works as a *frame*, the usage of which throws the accepted semantic norm out of realistic concerns, a frame which, paradoxically enough, acts also as an "estrangement" device. It is only by adding the twin concepts of rapprochement and metaphorical ground that a semantic model can be accounted for. But more on this later.

The founder of surrealism himself not only lauded "comme" as a marvellous instrument of rapprochement, but used it as well:

1. In the heart of the Indian territory of Oklahoma
A sitting man
Whose eye is like a cat turning around a pot of couch grass
(Breton, *Signe Ascendant*, 20)
2. The masked man is still standing in front of the naked woman
Whose hair falls down like light in the morning on a lamp-post one has forgotten to turn off
(Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 117)

The semantic rapprochement between colours through the use of the "like" device is also evidenced in Aragon in this passage from *Le Paysan de Paris*:

And suddenly, for the first time in my life, I was held by this idea that men have found only one term of comparison with what was blond: *like wheat*, and they thought they had said everything. Wheat, miserable, but have you ever looked at fern? I have bitten hair of fern for a whole year. I have known hair of resin, hair of topaz, hair of hysteria. Blond as hysteria, blond like the sky, blond like tiredness, blond like a kiss...How blond is the sound of rain, how blond is the song of

mirrors! From the perfume of gloves to the screech of the owl, from the beatings of the murderer's heart to the flower-flame of laburnum, from the bite to the song, so much blondness, so many eyelids: blondness of roofs, blondness of winds, blondness of tables or of palm leaves, there are whole days of blondness. (Aragon, 1945, 49)

more:

Blond is like the stammering of voluptuousness, like the piracies of lips, like the shiverings of clear waters. (50)

and even:

The fleeing hares! The rings of nails! The heart of the wood! The colour rose! The blood of plants! The eyes of does! Memory: memory is really blond. (51)

Aragon skilfully covers the whole gamut of images of blondness, from material things to passions and feelings and reaches a climax with what Todorov would classify as a logical anomaly: the colour rose is blond. Blond is thus not only a colour but also the feeling of this colour. Literature, to Aragon, is so limited, in its traditional form, as to have granted "blond" only one image, that of wheat. What a waste of imagination, of potential, Aragon says. "Blond," by the sheer will of the poet, explodes its semantic boundaries, yet does so in a way that retains an infinitesimal link to the original "blond" sememe.

I will show, in Part II, how Henry Miller is no less a master of the "like" as the French surrealists and their predecessors, and how he empowers these images with a regulated excess that stylistically surpasses, in effects, that of the surrealists. I will also show that the relationship between the signifier and the signified moves on to another level where the metaphor acquires a peculiar status in the Millerian text.

What this means is that the tenor and its vehicles are neither completely compatible nor completely incompatible, nor even existing in a compatible/incompatible relationship, something akin to what Mead proposed. A common ground holds the metaphor together in this example, but it may well be the surrealists' concept of the immanence, the interchangeability, the inter-relationship of everything in the universe, a concept better known as the theory of correspondences dear to Rimbaud and to Baudelaire and paramount in surrealism. But I hasten to clarify that immanence is not arbitrariness, the former possessing qualities of selected "aimed" diffusion, the latter of purposelessness only.

Immanence has many shapes, one of which is indeed the semantic device of synesthesia, where senses are interchanged, as in Rimbaud's famous poem "Voyelles" and in "Alchimie du Verbe" ["Alchemy of the word"] which describes his attempt as the "story of one of my madnesses:"

I invented the colour of vowels! A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green.—I regulated the form and the movement of every consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I flattered myself with inventing a poetic word accessible, one day or another, to all the senses. I wrote silences, nights, I noted the inexpressible. I fixed vertigos. (Rimbaud, 1981, 192)

The aim is obviously to liberate poetry from its medium, from its grapheme, from its intellectual connotations and present it, naked, to the senses where it would thus complete the circle from the poet's senses to those of the reader. Most importantly, the frame-breaking process aims with the Symbolists, at propelling the reader into another realm where the reality, it is believed, can be apprehended. Taste is also associated with colours, as in these lines by Rimbaud:

And the Violets of the Wood,
Sweetened spit of Black Nymphs!
(124)

Violets on the ground are splattered like spit, yet the colour, most probably linked to the fragrance, can only be sugary.

The semantic encounter, one has to admit, is, though spectacular in its effect, easily understood. Dada, in its much publicised effort at freeing language from its fetters, was also mixing colours and sounds together. Titles of dada poems are replete with colours: "The White Leper Giant of the Scenery" (Tzara, 1996, 41), "The Big Complaint of My Obscurity Two" (46), "Yellow Cold" (58), "Country See White" (66), etc. But as with all dada products, the shock produced was more a means to induce the *tabula rasa* condition than an intrinsic part of the discovery of knowledge as is the case in surrealism. If dada is satisfied with the moment of shock produced, surrealism takes this a step further and develops it into a *process* the duration of which is a key feature. The Millerian text, likewise, takes another indispensable—at least in this context—step forward and incorporates the moment into a more sustained narrative structure obviously absent from most surrealist productions.

With the preceding examples I have shown that a semantic analysis of the elements of the rapprochement can be, if not accurately analysed, then at least identified as belonging to a certain semantic field which is, in the

case of the metaphor, the ground on which the vehicle and the tenor work. Riffaterre similarly argues that the "formula" or the "idea" changes the "stylistic tonality" of the message (Riffaterre, 1971, 237) and that any given "motif" recurrent or stable enough to be identifiable *becomes* the stylistic process itself (249). Thus, in the case of surrealism, if the "formula" or the "idea" or the "ground" of the metaphor is the concept of *immanence*, then any semantic operation of rapprochement working on this field will be interpretable according to that field's characteristics. Yet, two objections can be levelled at my model, alongside the more obvious problems of the critic's choice, in the first place, of a certain model and not another:

1. A concept such as immanence is too vague and too wide to be precise and recognisable, and
2. A single concept/idea/ground cannot possibly account for the myriad of surrealist imagery produced.

In order to answer these objections, I would like to introduce the concepts of *macroground* and *microground*. This will be useful for my study in that it will perform two things: first, it will deal with the problems attending the surrealist image of excess per se, restoring crucial elements to the instruction of its metaphorical nature, and, second and most importantly, will provide the basis on which my ultimate comparison with the Millerian image of excess is to be developed and examined.

A macroground is a semantic field that would define a general all-encompassing ground which would function either independently or through its constituents. A microground is obviously one such constituent of a given macroground and would exhibit, in addition to the larger semantic field of parent ground, sememes peculiar to itself. In dada, the macroground is a nihil-like attitude to life, and the methods, sometimes harsh, employed by its masters⁴ are duplicated stylistically by the dadaists. An overabundance of phonetic, syntactic, and semantic violations are used in order to numb the mind and to force it to relinquish its hold on the person:

Dada is not modern at all, it is rather the return to a quasi-Buddhist religion of indifference. Dada puts an artificial softness on things, a snow of butterflies coming out of the magician's skull. Dada is stillness and does not understand passions. (Tzara, 1996, 268)

Furthermore,

Dada is a state of mind. It is because of this that it transforms itself according to races and events. Dada can be applied to everything, yet it is nothing, it is the point where the *yes* and the *no* come together, not solemnly in the castles of human

philosophies, but very simply at street corners like the dogs and the grasshoppers. Dada is useless like everything in life. (273)

A macroground dada informed by the above anchors phonetic, syntactic, and semantic peculiarities—or *faits de style*—in stylistic studies of dada texts.

In contrast to Dada, within surrealism's macrogrounds of immanence, automatism, desire, and freedom, there exist different microgrounds which are intimately related to each other and to the parent ground. Some of the more easily defined microgrounds are dreams and hallucinations, the city and woman.

When immanence is coupled with dreams and the ensuing hallucinatory images, the reader is confronted with text productions such as this one by Lautréamont:

Holding a head the skull of which I gnawed, I stood on one leg, like the heron, at the edge of the precipice dug in the flanks of the mountain. They saw me go down the valley, while the skin of my chest was motionless and calm, like the lid of a grave! Holding a head the skull of which I gnawed, I swam in the most dangerous chasms, and dived lower than the currents to witness, like a stranger, the combats of sea monsters...Holding a head the skull of which I gnawed, I crossed the ascending steps of a tall tower...I defied death and divine vengeance with a supreme boogie and hurled myself, like a brick, in the mouth of space. (Lautréamont, 1973, 118)

Having gone to the depths of the night below the currents where nothing moves except "sea monsters," and having then gone up the highest tower and seen the light, the protagonist has fathomed the two extremes of life and, fearless, has defied death. The triple repetition of the sentence "Holding a head the skull of which I gnawed" and the comparison of his chest to the lid of a grave, where his heart is dead, help bring forth images of stillness and fearlessness with a good dose of ghoulish nightmare. Witnessing the powers of life, darkness and light, is a demanding experience.

Maldoror, Lautréamont's protagonist, is the one whose "eye is always open" (64) and who cannot sleep. His day-dreaming experiences are not hallucinogenic:

I am dirty. The lice gnaw at me. The pigs, when they look at me, vomit. The crusts and bedsores of leprosy have scaled my skin, covered with yellowish pus. . . . On my nape, like on a dunghill, grows an enormous mushroom with umbelliferous peduncles. Sitting on a formless stool, I haven't moved my limbs for four centuries. (167–68)

Lice, pigs, crusts, bedsores, scales, pus, dunghill, an enormous mushroom, umbelliferous peduncles, all share a common semantic field of dirty and my organisms. From the beginning of the passage, the "I" is the element which is put in rapprochement with "dirty," the whole text revolving around the encounter between man and slime⁵.

Likewise, the surrealist text is both the product and the producer of oneiric images because reason is put in the background and can only witness the flow of hallucinations.

Breton asserts that "automatic writing, practised with some fervor, leads directly to visual hallucination, I have experienced this personally" (Matthews, 1977, 7), referring to the previously mentioned hallucinations during his early attempts at automatism with Soupault in *Les Champs Magnétiques*.

The microgrounds of "dream" and "hallucination" shape surrealist texts in more than one way. Words seem disconnected from each other, sentences are short, images possess the required "fulguration" of photographic shots—a temporality again—the normal train of thought is interrupted by incongruous images, the link between which is tenuous in the extreme yet not wholly arbitrary, just like the flow of images in dreams:

A little before midnight near the jetty.
If a dishevelled woman follows you don't pay attention to it.
It is the azure. You have nothing to fear from the azure.

Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 67)

Water is also associated with hallucinations in Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*. The passage I will quote is also of tremendous importance in the text of how the image is treated in prose form rather than in poetry. It is to be noted that this excerpt with its narrative structure allows not only syntactic development, by the very flexibility it presents between a relatively "normal" narrative description and the hallucination itself, but also provides, most importantly, that moment of hesitation on the part of the reader which is so crucial a point in the production of surprise and unpredictability. Narrative structure is highly relevant to my study of the Millerian excess since it provides a platform from which this excess and the accompanying reader response are launched. Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*—and Breton's *Nadja*—presents this rare opportunity in French surrealism where pure poetic moments are dismissed in favour of sequences conducive to the proliferation of economical images of excess. What I have called "border cases" are adequately placed in the middle of a stylistic spectrum on

the effectiveness and strategical value of excessive images. During the night when visiting the deserted "Passage de l'Opéra" with all its shops closed Aragon thinks he hears some monotonous noise coming from a walking stick shop. Coming closer, he expresses his surprise:

I noticed that the shop-front was swimming in a greenish light, almost underwater, the source of which remained unseen. This was because of the phosphorescence of the fish, as I realised when I was a child. It didn't seem to me that a physical explanation could be given as to this supernatural light, and especially as to the sound which was dimly filling the vault. I recognised the latter: it was the voice of the seashells. All the sea in the passage de l'Opéra. The sticks were lulling gently like kelps. I was still amazed by this enchantment when I saw a swimming form sliding between the tiers of the shop-front. (Aragon, 1945, 28–29)

Using the microground of dreams and hallucinations along with the macroground of the immanence and inter-relationship of manifestations, the reader can accurately pinpoint the semantic mechanisms in the encounter between sticks and kelps, between the shop-front and the greenish phosphorescence of the sea.

An unusual correlate of the surrealist's macroground of immanence is that all microgrounds, which are usually related to the parent ground and only partially related to each others, are, by virtue of the "immanence" field, intrinsically linked to most other microgrounds as well. Dream states and the accompanying stylistic modifications overflow into the surrealist's microground "city," as this line from Aragon shows:

Metaphysics of places, it is you who lull the children, it is you who people their dreams. (17)

The city acts as a catalyst to expose the narrator's inner emotions. Nadeau says about surrealism: "The important thing was to rediscover life under the thick carapace of centuries of culture—life pure, naked, raw, lacerated. The important thing was to bring the unconscious of a city into unison with the unconscious of men" (Nadeau, 1973, 107).

The bigger the city, the more images it can offer to the mind of the writer. It is thus not surprising that Paris is the focal point of surrealist endeavours and automatic experiments. Béhar says:

In the midst of this universe of objects, where Breton and his friends move about, is found the most dreamed of all objects, Paris, the city where everything can become possible. Each of the surrealists has one day evoked these endless walks in the city, in search of some Golden Fleece. (Behar and Carassou, 1984, 245)

Breton, always anxious to tempt chance, was keen on regularly abandoning himself to the streets of Paris, waiting for "something" to happen that would reveal to him, even more accurately than by other means, the hidden working of the surrealist encounter, transposed from images and inanimate objects to real life:

One can...be sure to meet me in Paris, to wait no more than three days without seeing me come and go, toward late afternoon, at the boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the *Mutin* printing house and the boulevard de Strasbourg. I don't know why it is there, indeed, that my steps take me; it is there that I almost always go without definite aim, without anything set except this obscure feeling that *that* (?) will happen there. (Breton, *Nadja*, 36–38)

Breton is a professional flâneur who, by putting himself in the most passive and receptive state possible, tries to capture and channel, as it were, the energies latent in the city through his unconscious. In fact, *Nadja* is the best introduction to the concept of the flâneur and of chance in surrealism. It is a chance encounter between Breton and Nadja in Paris that will open the former's "inner eye" to the potentials of a life of coincidences and that will also precipitate the latter into an asylum, never to be heard of again.

Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* is the counterpart of Breton's *Nadja* and describes—one has to remember the surrealists' initial aversion for description—Aragon's flâneries in the passage de l'Opéra and in the Buttes-Chaumont where philosophical musings combine with surrealist hallucinations, automatic writing, city mapping, typographical renderings of the city and its denizens, and a "Discourse of the Imagination." The city is the place for the poet who can decipher its secrets:

There exists in the trouble of places, locks which close badly on the infinite. There where the most equivocal activity of the living goes on, the inanimate sometimes takes on a reflection of their most secret longings: our cities are thus peopled with unknown sphinxes who do not stop the dreaming passer-by, if he does not turn on them his meditative distraction, who do not ask him deadly questions. But if he knows how to guess them, this wise man, then, let him ask them in turn, it will also be his own abyss which he will fathom with the help of these faceless monsters. (Aragon, 1945, 18)

In the universe of the text—the "places,"—movement and stillness are the two poles around which deviation occurs: the "activity of the living" underscores an unmarked narrative which is stopped by the sphinx-like, marked moment of an image triggered, interestingly, by the readers themselves. The "trouble" of such texts is indeed the magic of a dialectics combining markedness and unmarkedness. The "passer-by" in the passage

mentioned is the reader who walks in the text, in the sequentiality of the narrative, and who is suddenly stopped in his/her tracks by the "sphinxes" awaiting, as it were, around the corners. These spring unbidden, in a *vertical* movement, a *moment* which carries with it a markedness hard to ignore. Unwillingly, Breton links as well *flânerie* with a narrative kind of discourse:

The taste of adventure in all fields was far from having deserted us, I am talking about adventure in language as well as in the street or in dreams. Works like *Le Paysan de Paris* and *Nadja* account pretty well for this mental climate where the taste of *flânerie* is taken to its extreme limits. (Breton, *Entretiens*, 139)

"Woman-as-immanent" is, however, a doubling of the macroground "immanence" and therefore carries the semantic field to its extreme. The stylistician expects, even before seeing the text, semantic encounters between the sememe "woman" and diverse other sememes. The most famous poem which has achieved this marriage between woman and the world around her is again Breton's "L'Union Libre," where she is described in her minutest bodily parts: hair, thoughts [one of only two immaterial elements], waist, mouth, teeth, tongue (4 times), eyelashes, eyebrow temples, shoulders, wrists, fingers (twice), armpits, arms, legs, calves, feet (twice), neck, throat, breast (4 times), belly (twice), back (3 times), nape, hip (twice), buttocks (3 times), sexual organ (4 times), and eyes (6 times). All are coupled with the most intriguing elements if one forgets the macroground "woman-as-immanent." It is interesting to discover that Tzara, as early as 1916, in his *First Celestial Adventure of M. Antipyrine*, has his protagonist say:

—my beautiful child with the breasts of glass, with the parallel arms of ash
(Tzara, 1996, 36)

and to read Desnos' poem "Isabelle et Marie," written in 1923, eight years before Breton's "L'Union Libre:"

Isabelle met Marie at the bottom of the stairway:
"You're nothing but hair!" she told her.
—and you, a hand.
—hand yourself, shoulder blade!
—shoulder blade? This is too much, you tit.
—Tongue! tooth! pubis!
—eye!
...
—cunt!"
(Desnos, 1953, 88)

What was probably nothing more than a play on words and on the arbitrariness of swear-words was gravely transformed by Breton into perhaps one of the most intriguing and excessive, semantically speaking, love poems in French literature. I stress the word "perhaps" because, as "beautiful" as "L'Union Libre" may appear, it lends itself to another kind of response when subjected to a gendered reading. What is conspicuous in the Desnos passage as well as in Breton's poem is the fragmentation of woman: pieces and parts of the female body are scattered around the page in an endeavour which wants to appear respectful of woman but which in fact alienates her by a representation of fragmentation. Sara Mills points out that in pornographic literature the female body is fragmented and not pictured as unified, but rather as an object to be used and abused. Furthermore, the scene depicted cannot be focalised from her perspective and her own private experience is written out of the text. Is woman then an object that is offered for the gaze of the male reader (Mills, 1995, 171–72)? The Millerian text, as will be shown later, will exhibit, unfortunately, this same fragmentation feature taken almost to the extreme, an excess this time to be deplored.

Aragon adds to the "woman-as-immanent" microground another one, "woman-as-initiation:"

Woman, you take...the place of all forms...here you are again, and everything dies at your feet, [sic] At your feet in the sky a shadow engulfs me. At your feet toward the night I completely lose the remembrance of the day. Charming substitute, you are the summary of a marvellous, natural world, and it is you who is born again when I close my eyes. You are the wall and its hole. You are the horizon and the presence. The ladder and the iron bars. The total eclipse. The light. (Aragon, 1945, 219)

Here, he gasps at what he sees, and the woman says to him:

[T]hrough me everything breathes. Do you know the fashionable refrains? They are so full of me that one cannot sing them: they are whispered. Everything that lives off reflections, everything that shines, everything that penshes, to my steps is bound. I am Nana, the idea of time. Have you ever, my dear, loved an avalanche? Just look at my skin. Immortal, however, I look like a lunch of sun. A straw fire one would like to touch. But on this perpetual pyre it is the arsonist who burns. The sun is my little dog. As you can see, he follows me. (52)

Here again, the concept of woman is best developed by Aragon in a *narrative structure* which is mirrored in the double metaphor of the avalanche and the "lunch of sun:" *movement and stillness; a horizontality stopped by the suddenness of the vertical image.*

Interestingly enough, a long passage in Breton's *Nadja*—treated, no doubt, differently from the rest of the text by the mere fact that it is an extended footnote, hence, a *supplemental* addition—betrays the need for a narrative structure in order to create the moment of surprise which reveals the forces at work in the surrealist world. Breton recalls, with utmost gravity, one night when he was with Nadja:

[I] was driving a car on the road from Versailles to Paris, a woman, Nadja—but who could have been, couldn't she, any other, and even *that other*—was next to me; her foot now on mine pressing the gas pedal, trying to put her hands on my eyes, in the forgetfulness granted by an endless kiss, wanting that we exist no more, undoubtedly forever, only one for the other, and, in that way, that we speed toward the beautiful trees. (Breton, *Nadja*, 179)

The driving narrative is the sequence, the horizontality, the field where the surprising moment, the climax of the hands covering the eyes and the accompanying tension, provide the reader with the flash of a verticality abruptly stopping the flow. It is with passages like this one and like Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* that the French surrealist text for a moment reaches, but never fully masters, the Mullerian technique of a controlled and regulated flow of excess⁶.

"Woman-as-prostitute" also furnishes the surrealists with semantic fields to explore, and Aragon uses this microground to link woman and love to everything that is deemed by the vulgar as low and base:

Love, here is the only feeling that has enough greatness in it so that we can give it to the infinitely small. (Aragon, 1945, 41)

and, talking about prostitutes:

In everything that is low, there is something marvellous which invites me to pleasure. With these ladies, it is mixed with a certain taste for danger. (46–47)

Breton wrote that he had "never" slept with a prostitute because he had never loved one, and because he could never love a prostitute. To him, love and its "operations" were grave things (Breton, *Les Vases Communicants*, 84). Yet, in the same work, he witnesses a group of prostitutes trying to convince a rich customer to choose one of them. The spectacle, he writes, was very "relaxing" (114). Furthermore, in his poem "Un Homme et une Femme Absolument Blancs" ["A Man and a Woman Absolutely White"], he writes about the "marvellous" prostitutes:

I see their breasts which put a touch of sun in the deep night
And the time in which they rise and fall is the sole exact measure of life
I see their breasts which are stars on the waves

(Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 129)

Though he abhors them, Breton recognises that their trade symbolises what is most instinctive in man, what cannot be stopped or checked. They are "marvellous" in the night, the tip of their breasts shine and point the way in the darkness, like stars reflected in the waves, disappearing and reappearing again. Their breasts might be the only measure of a life still beating in mankind.

Such image of woman, again, is not without its problems. Janet Wolff mentions this "well-known construction of the virgin/whore dichotomy which counterposes the 'pure' woman...to the slut" and thus the "classical body" to the "grotesque" one (Wolff, 1990, 130), and Julia Stanley speaks as well of the image of the prostitute as being that of the "paradigmatic woman" for males (quoted in Cameron, 1986, 76). For, however romantic the surrealists try to portray the prostitute, this representation inevitably presents areas of potentially strong patriarchal connotations, even in the "woman-as-child" microground where, despite images of innocence mixed with the secrets which come with early womanhood, one can question male motives of a portrayal of woman as a helpless being:

A young naked girl in the arms of a beautiful dancer in full armour like St. George
(Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 63)

Woman, through all her incarnations, takes on the guise of a myth, and her cult is assiduously pursued by all surrealists. Indeed, to them, the passionate devotion to a single woman over a long period of time was the best way of liberating desire and imagination and thus of recovering the long-lost knowledge of the inner-self (Nadeau, 1973, 25). That such an image of woman is brought forth in a rush of semantic excess which is indeed aimed at the reader's emancipation is also worthy of notice.

NOTES

- 1 A process similarly described in Zen as "First, the mountains are mountains and the waters are waters... [then] the mountains are not mountains and the waters are not waters...and [finally] the mountains are mountains again and the waters are waters again" (Suzuki, 1972 vol. 1, 25)

2. My numbering.
3. Breton, in one of his moments of uncertainty, casts some doubts as to the full poetic purity of Lautréamont's famous encounter on the dissecting table (Breton, *Les Vases Communicants*, 67).
4. One has but to browse the collection of koans in Zenkei Shibayama's *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* (1974, New York, Mentor) and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1979, London, Rider & Co.) to find a plethora of vivid examples of such methods.
5. This brings to mind Riffaterre's "extended metaphor" model, of course, but the model is only valid in elucidating unrelated texts and is limited to metaphor, whereas the macro/microground model is able to cope with all sorts of figurative devices over a wide variety of texts and is also able to provide for a stabler and more easily recognizable semantic platform.
6. Breton, of course, disengaged himself and regained control of the car. Ever since, he has regretted his act and hoped to be able to reciprocate such a selfless act of love. Nadja was not able to initiate Breton, according to him, into the mysteries of love, life, and death.

Chapter Five

A Preliminary Assessment

After this short but necessary survey of excessive imagery in French surrealism, questions are raised: how does the surrealist stylistic structure fare in the light of Riffaterre's theory of deviation and in the light of this present study? What conclusions can we draw in the light of the use of the metaphorical image in its three registers, the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic? Does French surrealism allocate marked and unmarked elements efficiently enough in order to reach the delicate balance where convergence, and not saturation, enable the reader to make the most of the experience of reading he/she is faced with?

First, intrinsically marked elements, whether they are phonetic, syntactic, or semantic—with some exceptions already mentioned,—do not exist. Marked elements are appraised as such only in their relationship with their corresponding unmarked elements, and this in the context itself, not in some abstract external norm. It seems that surrealist technique is oblivious of this point since its approach to deviation is almost solely based on an external norm to be flouted. Except in the case of Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* and Breton's *Nadja*, the surrealist text does not carry with it its own *decoding* device. In other words, since it relies on an external norm to posit its deviation, it also fails, by the same token, to present, in contradistinction, marked and unmarked elements in the same text.

Second, convergence, the coming together of a number of marked *faits de style* (Riffaterre, 1971, 60–61), an enhancing process, does not seem to be always the preferred device in surrealism. Surrealist writers will either concentrate on lexical games (Desnos, Duchamp, Vitrac, Tzara), on syntactic irregularities (Tzara, Desnos), or on semantic rapprochements (Breton, Aragon). I have already pointed out this most fundamental flaw in surrealism. This weakness will be all the more prominent when put side by side with the Millerian text.

Third, the whole concept of deviation and the ensuing spark, so dear to the surrealists, is faulted by the very idea of *context*. Any structure is

recognisable only when stylistic contrasts appear in it. A stylistic *pattern*, which will be either marked or unmarked, is *interrupted* by an unpredictable element which becomes either marked or unmarked relatively to the preceding pattern. The *context*, in Riffaterrean terms, is the structural field where marked and unmarked elements come together to help create such identifiable structure (Riffaterre, 1971, 57). But in the majority of surrealist texts, especially those of Desnos, Duchamp, Tzara, and in many of Breton's poems, the context is nonexistent by the mere fact that all the elements are *marked*, in a way, and the space needed by *unmarked faits de style*, the condition of a recognisable structure, is minimised. When the density of marked elements far outgrows that of the unmarked one, *levelling* occurs and any effect of deviation and surprise is greatly reduced (Riffaterre, 1971, 87). "Anomaly" is, to repeat Riffaterre's theory, an anomaly *hic et nunc*, and not one relative to an outside norm difficult to pinpoint and classify. Surrealism is so "deviant" that it loses its effect. The stylistic context has a short time/space effect which is limited by memory: if the reader is asked to read a few lines of surrealist text, the effect will be noticeable, especially since the marked effects will be compared by him/her to the unmarked ones appearing on the title page, in the title itself, in the first unmarked words, or in the unmarked space occupied by any prior reading. But when the reader is *saturated* by many pages with nothing but marked elements, the context is automatically levelled and what was surprising at first, and unpredictable, becomes jaded and boring¹.

Is this why André Masson, as early as 1941, talked about the 1930 "disaster" of surrealism, and the ensuing triteness of its productions (Chipp, 1968, 436)? Could it be that the reliance on "pure" and "unmixed" automatism has been a disservice to surrealists who boasted so much of their inspiration that, to "outsiders," "what gushes forth is formless and chaotic and hence not art" (Canaday, 1983, 23)? Maurice Nadeau concluded his famous study of surrealism by saying that the school had failed, not because of some inherent defect, but because the surrealists were incapable of acting effectively on the society they tried to influence and remould (Nadeau, 1973, 239). My contention here is that, laying aside for the moment issues of value and social effectiveness, the surrealist stylistic structure, though propped up by very ingenious devices such as "rapprochement," "encounter," "dream imagery," "automatism," and my concept of macro/microgrounds, this stylistic structure, I repeat, fails, in the long term, to induce marked responses on readers. Furthermore, with the absence—or, at least, the atrophy—of an internal self-sustainable context on which marked and unmarked elements can interplay, the much-sought

effect is lost. An immediate result of this was shown in the impossibility of translating word games. In the long term, not only phonetic, but also syntactic and semantic effects, with no internal "mirroring" elements, are to either vanish, lose their immediate effectiveness, or be relegated to the museum of historical literary curiosities.

The intricate relationship between the use of surrealistic elements and techniques in poetry and in prose is also crucial. It will have been clear that "border cases," those texts which belong, on the spectrum, to moments when saturation is at its lowest, are mainly narrative productions. The images that appear in most surrealist texts are simply added up, piled up, so to speak, on a vertical axis, until their evocative power over the reader is exhausted. The images, to put it differently, are not exhibiting any additional semantic novelty and are variations on the same macro/micro-ground motif. It is as if the additional images were there to bring about a furthering of the impression in case the initial image proves to be insufficient. The effect on the reader, as I have hinted at before, is far from being a writerly one: he/she is hammered *ad nauseam* with variations on the same theme, and not allowed a moment's respite to recuperate more solid bearings from which a clearer view of the journey accomplished can be gained. But, to ask the question again, is a balanced flow really desirable? The surrealists, in a true show of excess, are denying temporality and turning their backs on an economy of means which is taken up by Miller who reaches his own excess by controlling the hitherto impetuous flow of the imagery. The reader, in this controlled flow, participates in a to-and-fro movement which both safeguards the integrity of the text and guarantees optimum reader response.

In this context, and closely related to the reader's response and surprise is Todorov's² definition of the "fantastic" as "the hesitation experienced by a being, who only knows the laws of nature, when faced with an event apparently supernatural" (Todorov, 1976, 29). This moment of hesitation on the part of the reader cannot occur, according to Todorov, in poetry or in allegory since it is already assumed that the text is not concerned with representation (36–37). Both Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* and Breton's *Nadja* are narratives in prose, and hesitation works best in these passages. Hesitation, as the Aragon Passage de l'Opéra extract mentioned earlier shows, is that moment in the text when the reader is skilfully taken to a place where the choice is his/hers: the jump has to be taken in either directions, reason or miracle, and the *moment* when this undecidability is experienced is when the reader is *writing* the text itself. To achieve such a feat, the text has obviously to exhibit these hesitation moments both *strategically*, by which I mean in specific places throughout the discourse, and

economically, by which I mean in such a way that they are neither too far from each other, which will lead to forgetfulness, nor too closely packed, which will inevitably lead to saturation. When these moments are thus engineered, convergence works at its best. My contention is that the Millerian text fulfils both conditions.

It is indeed the twin concepts of convergence and excess which inform the second part of my study. The Millerian text, as I will show, presents the reader and thus the critic with a text which capitalises on the best and most durable techniques which can be grouped under the heading of surrealist. It exhibits a very definite stylistic structure which takes advantage of *context* and *convergence*, and clearly lacks the shortcomings associated with the surrealist text. As excess, this text likewise provides a model which, when pitted against other literary excesses, presents features of economy and controlled flow. Furthermore, since the Millerian text presents no clear-cut division among the three stylistic registers—a definite sign of Riffaterrian *convergence*,—I will address the issues as they appear within the overall semantic field

NOTES

1. This does not mean that the surrealist text has no identifiable structure. The present argument centres on the *effectiveness* of the surrealist production.
2. Bakhtin's model cited as a footnote in the introduction also comes to mind.

► Part Two

The Millerian Text

He would have been a genius if he had pursued a more direct path instead of going out of his way to avoid being intelligible, had he not been as loose in matters of style as he was in everything else. Which is why you'll notice that his eloquence resembles a drunken man's, tortuous and rambling and thoroughly eccentric.

(Seneca describing Maecenas in his Letters from a Stoic, 1969, 214)

In this part I intend to provide a re-reading of the Millerian text. The preceding part has laid the foundations necessary for the pinpointing of how saturation sets in when attempts at literary deviation are made, and how excess is not necessarily conducive to successful deviatory effects on the reader. Miller, through a skilful use of a *narrative structure* which permits both inner deviation *and* the effective onset of unpredictability and surprise, achieves the necessary *convergence* of stylistic elements. Cognitive frames, broken by dadaism, and rebuilt by surrealism, are kept in a state of continuous breaking and rebuilding by the Millerian text, allowing Todorov's "fantastic" moment to be reached when the point of hesitation rests perched, as it were, between two unmarked passages. The oscillation is at its peak when Miller the "bastard" wrestler doubles as a juggler and then as an acrobat, delighting his readers as they write their own text in unison with the parabolic movement of the Millerian dialectic.

I will begin by showing that if surrealists prided themselves on the production of a spark capable of enlightening the realm of the "inner man," the Millerian use of metaphor is not content with puny sparks but with a total conflagration of the text. I will then explore the "voice" present in that conflagrated text in its relationship to inspiration, dictation, and automatism. I will also show that such a voice does not remain bogged down in phonetic and/or syntactic devices but escapes mechanicality by achieving semantic predominance through a narrative structure mostly lacking in surrealism.

Furthermore, this voice tackles stylistic deviation by providing its own normative *key*, a characteristic absent from both dadaism and surrealism, except for what I have called "border cases." The inner deviation mechanism is used by Miller in a way that safeguards the survival of the text and moves the reader into surprisingly rich metaphorical vistas and then back into a prose that is not less Millerian as it provides the necessary counterweight to the marked mode. Controlled excess is thus achieved in a movement which is best framed within a Dionysian-Apollonian dialectics that favours the reader's participation, as a *maenad*, in a festive and duplicitous text. The elements which make up this sparagmatic and omophagic celebratory experience, where the text is *torn apart* then *eaten raw*, will form the bulk of the last chapter of this part.

Chapter Six

Miller's Surrealists: Sparks but no Conflagrations

I ended the last part leaving the definite impression that the surrealist text relies so heavily on recurrent and immersing deviation on all the three levels of the language that saturation is bound to set in rapidly. With nothing but markedness present, the unmarked elements lose their normative and referential value.

This phenomenon was very clear to Henry Miller who carefully situated himself in relation to the surrealists and their predecessors. In this context, Dada's linguistic destructive qualities offered Miller a seductive alternative for stylistic deviation and, indeed, Miller acquiesces jubilantly to Dada's re-shuffling of the world, and, consequently, of literature and language by acknowledging the importance of Tzara, of Ernst, of Crevel and of all the others who rebelled against a world they thought crazy (*Capricorn*, 266). However, he resisted the wallowing into "sheer nonsense" because, like others, he was afraid of it. In fact, Miller had survived, in a way, his own personal destructive school of dadaism: he had progressed "from scholar to critic to poleaxer" (*Sexus*, 196). Miller, unlike dada, did not wish to destroy civilisation, despite the self-imposed "regression" from scholar to critic to poleaxer. Civilisation was destroying itself anyway (Hoffman, 1945, 43).

The American writer was, in the words of Gwendolyn Raaberg, "open to the spirit but generally not to the formalizations of the Surrealist movement" (Raaberg, 1979, 254). What these words imply and to what extent they apply to the Millerian text will be dealt with in the course of this study.

Where Breton wanted to fire indiscriminately into the crowd, Miller was content to sing from a distance of the impending millennium (Hassan, 1968, 68). Breton's controversial proposal is taken up in Miller's *Quiet Days in Clichy* and, it seems to me, quietly parodied: Miller and his friend meet a woman whom they identify as "the mistress of a famous surrealist poet" (*Clichy*, 37). Shortly after they invite her home she enters into a trance and begins to write poems offhandedly while they make love to her. Then she

suddenly stops and casually asks for her revolver: "I feel like shooting someone now" (43). After the two friends hurriedly dismiss her, they discuss the poetry she was writing and concur that there was only one good line, while the rest was "lunatic" (46). In *Black Spring*, the firing-in-the-crowd option is equated with pissing, where Miller wants to stand with his "pecker" in his hand and relieves his bladder in the gutter (125–126).

In fact, Miller's famous 1939 "An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere" sums up the American writer's attitude towards the French school: Lautréamont's dictum that poetry must be made by all, taken with great gusto by all the surrealists, should not be taken literally (*Selected Prose I*, 462). The textual experiments can only succeed when no initial theory is posited.

And another thing...it is a mistake to speak about Surrealism. There is no such thing: there are only Surrealists. They have existed in the past and they will exist in the future. The desire to posit an ism, to isolate the germ and cultivate it, is a bad sign. It means impotency (484)

To Miller, theories are unnecessary when each person turns their gaze inward: "...let each one promulgate his own laws, his own theories; let each one work his influence, his own havoc, his own miracles" (479). The result of blindly following dictums or, for that matter, manifestoes, is fatal:

Unfortunately, those who call themselves their successors [the successors of Rimbaud and Lautréamont] have never learned this technique. They give us a lot of piffle about the revolution—first the revolution of the word, now the revolution in the street. How are they going to make themselves heard and understood if they are going to use a language which is emasculated? Are they writing their beautiful poems for the angels above? Is it communication with the dead which they are trying to establish? (468)

The dadaists were, after all, more efficient despite their random destruction. They were "more entertaining. They had humour, at least." The surrealists, however, are "too conscious of what they are doing" (471). In a letter dated August 1936 to his life-long friend, Lawrence Durrell, Miller discloses the following:

About Surréalisme. Maybe you're one yourself. I agree that the leaders of the movement are highly conscious and deliberate and that's of course destructive...The French, because they are so lucid and so cerebral, sort of scare one off, but then the peculiar emphasis they give to it is inevitable, considering how rigorous and formal is their style of thought. In the films, the burlesque ones, the Americans achieve a pure and unadulterated Surrealism now and then—

always unconsciously...I have used the method here and there, when it came naturally and spontaneously. At least, I hope so. I don't start out by trying to be Surrealistic. (MacNiven, 1988, 15–16)

Indeed, the Surrealists were to him fighting a losing battle for survival, although most of the French ones were in New York at that time. In another letter to Durrell, written eleven years later, in February 1947, Miller says:

Well, according to Man Ray, the Existentialists and the Surrealists are now about to join in battle. They are both *ausgespielt*, in my opinion. Two cadavers fighting a foolish fray, what! What the world wants, I find, is—coffee, sugar, grease and warm clothing. The ideological warfare is over. (MacNiven, 1988, 202)

Amidst all these attacks, however, evident traces of affinity or even of mystical bonds exist. Miller sits in a restaurant in Paris facing Breton's apartment:

And now it is my last evening with my good friend Moricand. A modest repast in a restaurant on the rue Fontaine, diagonally opposite the living quarters of the Father of Surrealism. We spoke of him as we broke bread. (*Big Sur*, 293–94)

The surrealist stress on the power of the imagination and its waning away with the coming of adulthood—a Romantic view—is repeated in not too different words by Miller when he concedes the power to believe anything when at the age of sixteen. At twenty, the imagination is doomed, and completely and irrevocably in harness (*Sexus*, 363). In addition, Miller's personal and idiosyncratic version of Breton's "Let go" passage quoted in Part I runs thus:

Follow your instincts. For instance, maybe one day you'll feel like getting yourself a piece of tail. Don't have a bad conscience about it...Anything to make you relax, remember that. Always treat yourself well. If you feel like a worm, grovel; if you feel like a bird, fly. Don't worry about what the neighbours may think. Don't worry about your kids, they'll take care of themselves. As for your wife, maybe when she sees you happy she'll change her tune. (*Sexus*, 261)

The easy, casual style, the slang usage, the colloquial expressions, the vocabulary, the "I'm-your-friend-and-I-know-you" tone all convey a *laissez-faire* and *bon vivant* attitude missed by the "father" of surrealism and his disciples. Raaberg indeed describes Miller's surrealism as expressionistic (Raaberg, 1979, 255), in that Miller is not after dicta, pronouncements, and practical manuals for writing surrealistically. I agree with the general drift of

the description but I reserve judgement as to whether the Millerian text relies solely on emotional inputs or not. I prefer to this expressionistic description itself the more stylistically-oriented approach of Riffaterre and his notion of convergence: when all stylistic traits are concentrated in a text, markedness occurs, and the encoded system is allowed, first, survival (Riffaterre, 1971, 60–61) and, second, recognition. By recognition I mean the ability of a text to exhibit certain features of markedness which are peculiar to that text only. The relationship between marked and unmarked features, the ratio of recurrence, the mechanisms which allow the sliding of unmarked to marked, and, finally, the linguistic and thematic characteristics of both elements would give a fairly accurate representation of the text's style.

What the following chapters will show is that convergence towards excessive imagery is used at its best in the Millerian text.

Chapter Seven

The Millerian Metaphor-Image

Does Miller's image, generally speaking, really express the principle of "continual contradiction and paradox" (Parl, 1979, 1), is it characterised by its "furious trope" (Ibargüen, 1989, 228), or does it drift and anchor itself in tropes and memories (Decker, 1996, 8)? Should we agree with Durrell's characterisation of the Millerian images as "cadenzas" (MacNiven, 1988, 174), or with Gay-Louise Balliet's rather vague "hallucinogenic metaphor" notion in her study of the Millerian metaphor and its relationship with that of surrealism (Balliet, 1996, 44)? Does Miller use full-blown "surreal metaphors" (Balliet in her preface!) which are characterised by a language "such that words can be juxtaposed in almost any kind of relationship or non-relationship to alter reality by the addition of the bizarre, the unconscious, dream, and imagination" (33)? Is Miller guilty, "beyond a serious doubt" of a "quiet but brilliantly varied appropriation of the French poet's [Rimbaud's] *Symboliste* tricks of metaphor and rhetoric that accounts for much of the 'magic' which many have sensed while reading [The Colossus of Maroussi]" (Mathieu, 1976b, 7)?

It is important to keep in mind, as readers, that the Millerian text—as is the case with all texts, for that matter—is a very rich web which can only be partially and ultimately unsatisfyingly decoded. It is not enough, in the current state of literary criticism, to say that Miller "took a literary language discovered by the surrealists after Freud, full of symbol and myth," and that he wrote "works of poetic beauty that few writers have been able to match" (Crossen, 1978, ix), nor is it particularly enlightening to discover that Miller experimented with traditional linguistic techniques and appropriated "basically visual surrealistic methods" (Lewis, 1971, 29). Raaberg points out that Miller was particularly impressed by Dalí's concern with metaphor, especially the concepts of the "anthropomorphic article" and the "intestinal morphological metaphor" the first taking on an independent life of its own, the second depicting an image involving the emotional response of individuals to the objects surrounding them (Raaberg, 1979, 254).

Granted, but I have to agree with Raoul Ibargüen that the famous passage in *Black Spring* entitled "The Angel is my Watermark" is also a parody of surrealist painting (Ibargüen, 1989, 205), randomness, and mechanicality. It is also a parody of Bretonian dictation and automatism: Miller-the-protagonist wakes up possessed by inspiration and is afraid that the poetic rush will be too much to handle, and that if it continues, he will have a hemorrhage (*Black Spring*, 58). He decides to go out and take some fresh air and if the dictation starts, never mind, he's out for lunch (58). In the evening the urge gets stronger and Miller has to start: "Begin with a horse!" (61). Breton told his emulators to begin with any letter, and Miller begins with a horse to see what happens. The horse's bottom appears first, then the trunk, then the legs which turn out to be five—a clear allusion to the Futurists' many-legged stallions—then the fifth leg turns into a phallus erectus. Et voila! The result is fascinating: Miller finds gods and goddesses, bats and devils, sewing machines, locks and keys, coffins and skeletons. Everything, that is, but a horse. The horse is missing, and thus something radical, to Miller, is missing (64).

In other words, and in stylistic parlance, *we want to know what has become of the signified*. What has become of the relationship between the tenor and the vehicle? How can the image subsist in a cacophony of vehicles? Riffaterre's "extended metaphor" is stretched to its limits so much that the horse is no longer visible, and even the macro/micro-grounds of the surrealist image hardly hold the metaphor in place, despite, or, more precisely, because of, the excessive technicalities involved, taught by successive waves of surrealists, and repeated ad nauseam. But does the Millerian text itself emerge free from such technicalities? How does the image hold its own? Before reviewing the unavoidable inventory of purely linguistic devices used in that text to generate markedness, let us turn our attention to general considerations about the Millerian image.

That the surrealists employed to perfection strings of associations is evident. In fact, all imagery relies more or less on a relationship between one element and another—in the case of metaphor, as we have already seen, between the tenor and the vehicle. Steven Foster argues that *Tropic of Cancer* extensively uses the technique of word association to create its imagery: "Often a simple trifle—a tree, a waiter, a package, a room, a shop window—will call to mind a marvelous string of associations" (Foster, 1964, 206), which prompts Linda Lehrer to try and demonstrate to her readers that "Miller's approach to his art is not unique or revolutionary" (Lehrer, 1975, 110).

However, what distinguishes the Millerian text from its contemporary rivals is not the way in which the various elements of the image are associated together but in what lies behind or beyond the choosing of the elements themselves and the connection between them. Bertrand Mathieu makes a point when he tries to explain the word associations present in Miller's *Colossus of Maroussi* in that a deeper reality is to be sought not in material objects but in "the subtler connections that exist between man and his universe, sometimes perceptible, sometimes intelligible, and sometimes wholly elusive to human understanding" (Mathieu, 1976b, 14). We saw earlier how the Symbolists (Rimbaud and Baudelaire, to name but two) were convinced that subtle threads exist between the material world and the spiritual one, and how the poet, with the help of words, can gain access to the realm of the beyond. Emmanuel Swedenborg's semi-religious views are also cited as a source for the Millerian word associations, especially because of the former's belief that the verbal and the phenomenal spheres are intimately connected (90).

Indeed, the protagonist of *Nexus* is awed by what he believes is the extraneous origin of images, in a move that radically takes him from the mere lexical devices favoured by the dadaists and the surrealists towards a more transcendentalist approach:

I read on, intoxicated as always. The words were no longer words but living images, images fresh from the mould, shimmering, palpitating, undulating, choking me by their very excrescence. (*Nexus*, 264)

Likewise, Ihab Hassan moves away from the notion of purely free word associations and ascribes the process to Miller's own psychic makeup:

But the associations of Miller are never really free; they are governed...by a secret compulsion, which sets a rhythm throughout the book. What is the source of that compulsion, the force behind both rhythm and digression, chance and recurrence? The source, I think, is...Miller's fanaticism, his will to believe...Miller's "fanaticism" sustains his errors, and his errors constantly beget new hopes. (Hassan, 1968, 75)

Maybe such passages as the following prompted Hassan's pronouncement:

I was drugged ...I lay abed with eyes lightly closed and reviewed the procession of hypnagogic images which passed like ghostly sentinels from station to station along the tenuous frontiers of sleep. (*Sexus*, 270)

The above-mentioned "hypnagogic images" just before sleep recall to mind Breton's seminal introduction to surrealism, with the addition of an anchoring on the protagonist's idiosyncratic psyche.

The Millerian image also makes use of metonymy with happy results: the images succeed each other on a syntagmatic level, on the horizontal axis, but retain vertical correspondences on the paradigmatic plane as is shown in a piece meant to be a film-script for Anaïs Nin's *The House of Incest* entitled "Scenario:"

Alraune now pounces on Mandra hungrily. Unclasping her heavy steel bracelet she fastens it upon Mandra's wrist. As the bracelet closes about her wrist Mandra's eyes glow ecstatically. They seem to be flooded with a supernatural light. Suddenly the walls of the room give way and the line of Mandra's vision leads us through caves and grottoes cluttered with brilliant stalagmites—one cave leading into another through a labyrinthine maze. The light diminishes rapidly. We are in the garden again and the bowl is shown close up; the moon, reflected in the churning water, is spitting fire from its dead craters. The goldfish flash again; they leap like flying fish, like sharks and swordfish, their flaming fins brilliant as jewels. (*Selected Prose II*, 438)

From the round bracelet, the round eyes of Mandra glow with supernatural light and dilate to fill the room, and then mutate into round caves and grottoes where the initial glow is transformed into stalagmites. The labyrinthine maze is of course the succession of the images themselves, leading to a presumably round garden in which a round bowl reflects the disc of the moon. Led by the initial glow, the dead craters of the moon, equated with the goldfish in the bowl, spew fire. This passage is interesting in that it is led by visual images such as one can find in movies like "L'Âge d'Or" by Luis Buñuel but it also asserts itself in the medium of writing via tropes like alliteration, a metonymical device itself: the fish flash, they leap like flying fish, like sharks and swordfish, flaming fins and jewels. All are fricatives and sibilants. The passage can be decoded thus as a series of metonymical progressions revolving around a central textual device. What this centre consists of will be shown later on in this study.

What the reader will notice when confronted with Millerian imagery is the peculiar and consistent cachet of emphasis and hyperbole attached to the image. And, as we know, stylistic features, both marked and unmarked are generated not only by the language itself, but also by the peculiar cachet or, in other words, by the limits the writer imposes on the language he/she uses. Otherwise, a style would not be recognisable as belonging to this or that writer. Hyperbole is thus a characteristic trait of the Millerian text and, to a certain extent, of surrealist ones, though I would prefer to ascribe to

the former a wider amplitude and to the latter a more vivid strangeness. Hassan writes: "Every subject Miller touches—art, history, civilization, religion—is fired by his sense of outrage and transfigured by his hope of apocalypse" (Hassan, 1968, 29).

Some critics have seen in the Millerian hyperbole a deferral of the capture of the self even though the production of the image itself seems to deepen the hero's understanding of that self (Decker, 1996, 123). Others have characterised the Millerian hyperbole as "periodic modulations into frenetic diatribes" (Ibarguen, 1989, 143), as "self-indulgent bombast" and as lacking "mesure" (Brown, 1986, 4). I addressed the question of violating "mesure" in the preceding part. Linda Lehrer does not hesitate to say that Miller "has felt the necessity of sacrificing form and structure to the more important task of telling the truth in any way he can" (Lehrer, 1975, 84).

Even a cursory glance at the examples given above should be enough to belie this description. The Millerian text is much less deviant phonologically and syntactically than the surrealist one, as the reader can check by going back to the preceding part. What is sometimes dubbed the "rhetoric of grotesque" (Widmer, 1963, 117) is a hyperbole that exhibits, among other things, incongruity and maybe alarm, but in a very controlled manner (Rahv, 1949, 28).

It is interesting indeed to find that the Millerian text exhibits very few of the word games championed by the surrealists. First, alliteration, assonance, word echoing, rhymed endings, anaphora and other purely phonetic devices are used but do not account, ultimately, for Miller's fame as a surrealist ogre. Rather, they are used very sparingly, and then just for the playfulness of it:

...a spate of catastrophes which invariably caused her to weep, drool, dribble, snuffle and snuffle (*Nexus*, 84)

A genuine pipparoo, with a mind that jumped like a kangaroo. (227)

Second, syntactic markedness has been documented by Balliet who uses Inez Hedges' "mismatch" notion. Hedges categorises surrealist imagery as, among other things, a series of mismatches between different elements. Balliet applies this approach to Miller and notes mismatches between subject and verb (ex.: "mumosas weep," Balliet, 1996, 80), adjective and noun (ex.: "laboratory cunt," 82), possession mismatches (ex.: "cancer of time," 84), "is" clauses (ex.: "world is a cancer," 86), prepositional phrases (ex.: "subside into the humus," 89), etc. However interesting this research might be, little insight, however, is gained into the workings of the Millerian

text, as every single device used by Miller is seen by Balliet as serving the ends of the "expansion/contraction" image.

Semantically speaking, a simple yet effective device of markedness, used with equal fortune by the surrealists, is the "like" phrases so dear to Breton in his search for the analogical image. As expected, Balliet's compilation of "like" phrases ends up with the conclusion that these phrases' sole role is to help the reader "visualize the incongruity and the expansion/contraction working" (Balliet, 1996, 90). If, however, the reader recalls what I said earlier in connection with the symbolist and the surrealist "comme," it will be evident that the simile performs the paramount task of rapprochement of two images hitherto distinct. The coming together of the two elements, just like the coming together on the operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella, throws a new light on the relationship between material objects. Different sememes are joined to produce a new entity which acquires a *de facto* right to existence in the registers of the language. In addition, the Millerian simile strikes the reader not only as new, but as humorous and very pertinent. Incongruity is seldom met with, on the contrary:

The beast [a cat]...has a few grains of cayenne pepper on the soft lilypad of his nose, the butt of his nose soft as a dum-dum bullet...He claws the carpet and chews the wallpaper, he rolls into a spiral and unrolls like a corolla... (*Black Spring*, 133)

His frailties were human frailties and he wore them jauntily, tauntingly, flauntingly, like banderillas. (6)

I retraced my steps to the river, to that grim, dismal street which ran like a shriveled urethra beneath the overhanging terraces of the rich. (*Sexus*, 458)

He falls on her lap and lies there quivering like a toothache. (*Cancer*, 42)

It was a pot-pourri of forgotten melodies spiced with aloes and the juice of porcupines, played sometimes in three keys at once and pivoting always like a waltzing mouse around the immaculate conception. (*Capricorn*, 227)

We could go on at length, for it is very true that "like" and "as" phrases are so numerous in all of Miller's works as to warrant special attention. The simile works hand-in-hand with the text's instinct for self-preservation. To be clearer, it acts as a textual reminder that all associations are governed by the law of rapprochement, that not only lexical items but also syntactic structures and semantic constructions are brought together to produce infinite relationships. The simile is also a reminder that tenses and moods are two faces of the same coin: the past, as we shall see later on, is

intimately connected to the present to produce a sense of continuity. It is in this context, along with the additional surrealistic uses of the simile, that "like" phrases should be understood.

Serving a similar purpose is the Millerian text's use of catalogues and blazoning. Again, whereas some critics take it for granted that catalogues are formulas used by Miller to deal with a threatening reality (Nelson, 1970, 140) and that the process of naming controls the threat to the individual ego (169), or that these catalogues subvert their antecedents "by suggesting the endless spiraling of memory, the infinitely receding conclusion of the project of recovery and creation" (Decker, 1996, 24), it remains to be seen how enumeration is conducive to the production of markedness and peculiarity far from concerns of an authorial/biographical nature.

Decker gets nearer the point when he says that by using catalogues, "Miller subtly reminds the supraself (and the reader) that the story never ends...Word tumbles after word in a breathless outpouring of textual noise" (147). John Parkin equates Miller's word-lists with those of Rabelais in *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* and speaks in this context of "logomania" (Parkin, 1990, 69). The breathless enumeration of objects, actions, or states, the list's imposition of a "reductive order on signifieds" (94), all act as a hypnotic bait which suspends, even for seconds, the readers' powers of attention, thus re-directing their individual intertextual responses away from the original signified. Of course, it is this original signified which prompts the response, and it never wholly disappears, giving birth, on the contrary, to a new constellation of meanings and, as I will show later, of signification:

I saw the army of men, women and children...weeping, begging, beseeching, imploring, cursing, spitting, fuming, threatening. (*Capricorn*, 28)

This paratactic series (from *parataxis*, a process of accumulation) is a succession of synonyms arranged in such a way and in such a position that, in order to understand them, the referential meaning of the words—supposing it is not understood—is not needed (Riffaterre, 1983, 36–38), i.e., the effect of the device is sufficient and is not necessarily tied to the meaning of the individual words. That this paratactic series accomplishes the additional feat of submerging the reader with a hail of misery is also evident. The semantic content is translated onto the lexical register by a process of accumulation.

Another paratactic series is shown in the use of blazoning. The blazon is originally the shield worn by noble families, and blazoning was—and still is—the enumeration of the tinctures, divisions, and charges painted on the coat of arms. The definition of the blazon given by Riffaterre is that of a text

"written in praise or dispraise of an object that usually had little significance in itself, the point being to lend it significance through a disproportionate verbal construction" (Riffaterre, 1980, 128). Miller's use of blazoning for the traditional celebration of the female body is given as a counterpart to Breton's in his "L'union Libre:"

Everything is out of proportion—hands, feet, thighs, ankles. She's an equestrian statue without the horse, a fountain of flesh worn away to a mammoth egg. Out of the ballroom of flesh her body sings like iron. Girl of my dreams, what a splendid cage you make! Only where is the little perch for your three-pointed toes?... You have the profile of a line drawing done with a meat-ax. Your mouth is a crater stuffed with lettuce leaves. Did I ever dream that you could be so enormously warm and lopsided? Let me look at your lovely jackal paws; let me hear the croaking, dingy chortle of your dry breath (*Black Spring*, 156–57)

*Sexus*⁹ Cleo is another woman blazoned in strong marked imagery:

Her belly has become a swollen, sullen sea in which the brilliant carmine navel tosses about like the gasping mouth of a *naufagé* (441)

The surrealist blazoning has been already dealt with in the context of rapprochement. The Millerian kind is also geared towards the coming together of a new image and is more akin to Lautréamont's "beau comme" series in the intensity of its constitutive elements. It is to be noted that the Millerian blazon, and, for that matter, the Millerian metaphor, are more complex, on the syntactic level, than the Bretonian ones. Instead of a simple construction equating the woman to the image ascribed to her, complex phrases with embedded structures are more often used.

The reader is forced not only to acquiesce to the new image produced, but also, and more importantly, to dig for the significance of this complex image. Breton's woman has a belly likened to the unfolding of the fan of days (Breton, *Clair de Terre*, 94), whereas Miller's has one of "a swollen, sullen sea in which the brilliant carmine navel tosses about like the gasping mouth of a *naufagé*." The image here is double: the dancing belly is a swollen sea in dull movement, and the navel is tossed about by the waves and ripples of the belly, opening up like the mouth of a drowning man gasping for air. In fact, where the surrealist analogy is composed of a double image, the original one and the derived one, the Millerian analogy is very often of a triple or quadruple nature, offering the reader a trampoline from which the imagination jumps into more complex layers of signification.

However, this multiple nature of the Millerian image diverges from that of the surrealist one not only in terms of richness but also in terms of

stylistic effect. Indeed, if saturation works as a piling up of images, a repetition on the same pattern on the vertical plane, convergence, on the contrary, works on both the vertical and horizontal planes: the effect is not one of mindless and pointless piling up but one of concerted, multi-lateral adding up very much conducive to a more pronounced stylistic effect. Although the words in surrealism were supposed, according to Breton, to "make love," their effect pales, in comparison, with those of the Millerian image. Giving advice to a young writer, Miller said: "If you can't have the words make love, don't masturbate them!" ("Conseils," 66). The piling up of images in surrealism, then, to Miller, is akin to *stylistic masturbation*. It is an ultimately fruitless expenditure of energy, an outpouring of excess which only yields fast, short-term pleasure and surprise, and the Millerian text, by contrast, by the nature of the imagery it produces, is closer, paradoxically, to Breton's famous pronouncement. But is the expenditure of energy to be fruitful anyway? Isn't Miller in fact constructing a very peculiar version of controlled excess?

How Miller succeeds in achieving this stylistic feat and what the relationship between the words, the language, and the "voice" of both the author and his text is will be what I attempt to elucidate in the following chapter.

NOTE

1. No page given.

Chapter Eight

The Voice of the Text

Did I fear, unconsciously, that if I succeeded in letting myself go I would be speaking with my own voice?

Nexus, 244

Miller, we know, found his voice in France in the 1930s.

Stuhlmann, 1992, 111

The Millerian text's characterization as "cadenzas" (MacNiven, 1988, 174); the "white heat" of the prose passages (Ekberg, 1981, 11); its author a "monster" (Mailer, 1976, 10); the post-modern voice (Holdefer, 1993, 62), all point to a need to investigate the nature of the Millerian voice.

The nature of Miller's works offers an interesting challenge to critics. Is it autobiographical, fictional, or both, a kind of autobiographical fiction? In the texts I am interested in, the author, Henry Miller, tells, through a narrator, Henry Miller as well, the supposedly biographical adventures of the hero, Henry. According to James Goodwin, in his essay "Henry Miller, American Autobiographer," Miller's discovery of his "voice" could only have been achieved through the "rediscovery of an originating impulse in our national literature—autobiography" (Goodwin, 1992, 298), and Miller is equated with Benjamin Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (299–301) in their search of an American vernacular voice. But, to Todorov, the narrator is not the author (likewise, the narratee is not the actual reader) and, what is more, the persona-narrator, which is the case here, exhibits specific characteristics:

[T]he narrator does not *speak*, like the protagonists in the narrative, he *tells*. Thus, far from joining in himself the hero and the narrator, the one who "tells" the book has a particularly unique position: as different from the persona he would have been if he were called "he" than from the narrator (implicit author) who is a potential "I." (Todorov, 1973, 66)

The Millerian persona-narrator is thus a complex entity who is neither the pure translation of the "I" of the author, as Miller undoubtedly would have us believe¹, nor the "he/she" of a purely fictional persona². Bakhtin says that the persona is a factor of stratification of novelistic discourse and of introduction of plurivocality (Bakhtin, 1991, 140). This situational ambiguity is, interestingly, mirrored by this persona-narrator himself: the Millerian hero, throughout the novels, is in search of his "voice," an obsession obviously shared by his creator Henry Miller (Perlès, 1955, 6). This search for voice goes back to the beginnings of the writing act and Miller, time and again, assured his readers that he had found his "real" voice, a voice understandably different from all other voices, unique, and specifically Millerian:

I was writing Surrealistically in America before I had ever heard the word. Of course I got a good kick in the pants for it. (*Selected Prose I*, 469)

We can say with a modicum of certainty that Miller's only two novels written in America before his departure to Paris were literary failures, even by today's standards, but we cannot completely agree either with John Parkin's categorical statement that Miller's "unique" voice is a "bogus" concept (Parkin, 1990, 213). Leon Lewis mitigates Parkin's approach by saying that Miller tried using bits and pieces of all the voices he had read, a mixture of Rabelais, Breton, Whitman, Emerson, Retif, and Lawrence. A specifically Millerian language is, according to Lewis, missing. Miller found a new voice, yes, but not a new language (Lewis, 1971, 36). I think the confusion stems from a disagreement or a misunderstanding of the terms used. If by "voice" style is meant, then, definitely, the Millerian style exhibits characteristics peculiar to itself. That it is influenced by other texts is not something new. All texts are made up of intertexts, and the web, the "tissue" of the text, naturally exhibits, in its seams, other tissues.

According to Harold Bloom, all of artistic creativity is a struggle between the great figures, the "predecessors" or the "strong poets," and the "ephebes." The voice of the "dead" is always present in the text being written (Bloom, 1997, xxiv). I don't think Miller would be so naive as to be convinced that he had created a language ex nihilo. Lewis adds that, despite all, Miller was unable to fashion the language he needed (Lewis, 1971, 40). It is the purpose of this study, let me say again, to show what the Millerian text consists of. If the endeavour is successful, and a Millerian style is made evident, then a specific Millerian "voice" would then have been posited.

That Miller-the-author was a gifted talker, I gave proof earlier in the introduction. Whether this "voice" was recreated in the text is to be seen.

Ronald Gottesman, in his introduction to an anthology of critical essays on Miller, quotes Michael Fraenkel, one of the American author's old friends in Paris, as equating the book and the author Henry Miller through the power of "talk." Gottesman observes that as the latter "brought it under control in the act of writing and revising, it became one of the salient features of his style, giving a distinctive immediacy to his writing that lives as much in the mind's ear as in the mind's eye" (Gottesman, 1992, 3). Indeed, the power of speech is also apparent in the fact that *voice*, paradoxically enough in a context where the written word is predominant, points to a certain *immediacy* which can only be experienced by the reader him-/herself. The voice of the text is the *immediacy* experienced by its readers when marked and unmarked, as I will show in more detail later, combine to produce the unified, and particularly recognisable, style I call Millerian.

A particularly modernist characteristic indeed is the attempt to find the *moment* amidst the sequentiality of the narrative, the point where movement and a dynamic kind of stasis merge and create the flow of the text. The narrative process, given second place by the surrealists, is the only mode that affords the sequentiality which is to be broken by the *moment*, by the *image*. Here Riffaterre and Fish come together: if the narrative is Riffaterre's structure, then the moment experienced is in fact the *reader's* writing of the text. Stylistics has made a full circle by catering for both inherent textual devices and reader response. It is interesting to note that Kate Millett, in her book *Flying*, describes Miller's technique as "analysis in movement" and adds: "Henry's daily and continuous flow of life, his sexual activity, his talks with everyone, his café life, his conversations with people in the streets, which I once considered an interruption to writing, I now believe to be a quality which distinguishes him from other writers" (quoted in Woolf, 1985, 287). Indeed, one of the main assumptions of this study is that what I call the "Millerian" text in fact embodies a specific "voice" with specific characteristics, the most important of which is the economical and dialectical use of marked and unmarked passages, and an excess imagery that delivers a text to the reader to be used in a writerly manner.

That this voice, or this "Millerian text" is a quality that has not always accompanied Henry Miller the author is something the critics have realised.

Jeffrey Bartlett, in his essay "The Late Modernist" accurately writes that "Miller is most truly a modernist in the works he wrote before World War II" (Bartlett, 1992, 326). Indeed, as will be made clear during the course of this part, it is when Miller as a writer begins to move away from this stylistic configuration that his text proportionally loses the right to be called "Millerian." In the same vein, but in another context, Widmer categorically

states that, as far as Miller's "American comedy" style is concerned, it went down in quality when the American author abandoned "his nihilism and other intellectual costuming for a mélange of affirmative mysticisms and sentimental positivity in his later writings" (Widmer, 1987, 222). Again, Gunther Stuhlmann, in an essay on the centenary of Miller's birth, is of the same opinion: in the 1940s and 1950s, "no 'major' book appeared in America to solidify his literary reputation which, for better or worse, rested on the shock value of his Paris books" (Stuhlmann, 1992, 113).

What Bartlett, Widmer, Stuhlmann, and others intuitively feel is, I would argue, the shift in Miller's handling of the relationship between marked and unmarked modes of writing. Miller initially tried to duplicate his speech powers onto letter-writing³, trying to get hold, as it were, of this textual capacity:

The real effort was going into the letter writing, and perhaps it was best so, now that I look back on it, because it preserved the speed and naturalness of my true voice. I was far too self-conscious, in the early days, to use my own voice...Some of my more honest friends, brutally candid as they often were, would occasionally remind me that in talking to them I was always myself but that in writing I was not. "Why don't you write like you talk?" they would say. (*Plexus*, 44)

Miller-the-hero makes no secret that the search for voice, as in painting and in music, begins by imitating the masters, using every device discovered and employing whatever register, confusing technique with creation (*Plexus*, 44). And even then, mastery is not within the domain of the reachable⁴, for, to him, acquiring the right technique would require a hundred years (44). At the other end of the scale, it is not self-surpassing but self-effacement that permits voice to be heard in its fullness in this passage from Derrida's essay "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book" in *Writing and Difference*:

Absence of the writer too. For to write is to draw back. Not to retire into one's tent, in order to write, but to draw back from one's writing itself. To be grounded far from one's language, to emancipate it or lose one's hold on it, to let it make its way alone and unarmed. To leave speech. To be a poet is to know how to leave speech. To let it speak alone, which it can do only in its written form. (Derrida, 1997, 70)

Derrida's unsettling of the logocentric bias, originally portraying writing as a supplement to speech, is interesting in this context. Indeed, the Millerian voice is both presence and absence, a presence that struggles to express itself in writing, and an absence that alone permits this same voice to be carried through to the reader from the text. By letting speech "speak alone,"

Miller's voice can become detached from Miller-the-author, a faculty that exists independently from its originator, a voice from which the writer is ultimately "absent." Ihab Hassan in this context speaks of Miller who, "inebriate of words," attains the language of silence (Hassan, 1968, 59).

Katsimbalis, the hero of *The Colossus of Maroussi*, Miller-the-hero's double, is possessed of the gift of voice, and the captivation exerted on the reader or audience is ultimate:

Many a time, as Katsimbalis talked, I caught that look on the face of a listener which told me that the invisible wires had been connected, that something was being communicated which was over and above language, over and above personality, something magical which we recognise in dream and which makes the face of the sleeper relax and expand with a bloom such as we rarely see in waking life. (31)

Voice acts on the reader/listener in a very strong way:

He [Katsimbalis] could galvanise the dead with his talk. It was a sort of devouring process: when he described a place he ate into it, like a goat attacking a carpet. If he described a person he ate him alive from head to toe. If it were an event he would devour every detail, like an army of white ants descending upon a forest. He was everywhere at once, in his talk. He attacked from above and below, from the front, rear and flanks. (30)

Jack Parl, in his *A Study of Contradiction in Henry Miller's "Tropic of Capricorn"*, writes that the voice of the text and the word-play result from an aesthetic struggle between the narrator's confession or thought and the verbal narrative (Parl, 1979, 22). Whatever is not verbal is the excuse for the voice to take over. *Capricorn* is not about a story, and not about psychological development either. It is a pure exercise in language in which the narrator—and the text itself, if I may add—is regenerated through the discovery of the power of words (Parl, 1979, 140). Miller's *sens de la mesure* is the text's way of keeping itself by, paradoxically speaking, surpassing its own limits, delighting the reader with the playful and sometimes facetious experiments with itself. The language attains "verbal efflorescence" (Parl, 1979, 86) and the text reaches, through echolalia, the "silence of non-signification" (96) as in this passage from Miller's play *Just Wild about Harry*:

The epithalamium, being unusually sensitive in the infra-uterine region of the pelvis, exposes the subject to aseptic infiltrations alternating with excessive hemorrhages induced by failure of the haemoglobin to respond with its customary elasticity. What's more, the cervical coccyx, when dilated or expanded to interstitial proportions, brings about an eleemosynary condition of the respiratory pustules

situated just above the metatarsal sphincter. That is to say, adjacent or contiguous to the ophthalmic urethra (*Just Wild about Harry*, 31)

Which does not prevent the interlocutor from shouting:

Listen, you fathead, let's get down to brass tacks. You know what's the matter with you? You've got loggamundiddy of the googoo...Now tell me what time it is by the hepsidipsera! (32)

Sound is here emphasised at the expense of meaning, or, in linguistic terms, the signifier takes over the signified as semantic certainty collapses. Derrida explains:

This overpowerfulness as the life of the signifier is produced within the anxiety and the wandering of the language always richer than knowledge, the language always capable of the movement which takes it further than peaceful and sedentary certitude. (Derrida, 1997, 73)

In *The Air-conditioned Nightmare*, Miller-the-hero, in a virtuoso move not unlike that of Rimbaud in his poem "Vowels" muses over the series of signifieds brought to life by the signifier "Mobile" (of Mobile Bay, USA) which is, incidentally, both a noun and an adjective, a moment and a movement:

Mobile is a deceptive word. It sounds quick and yet it suggests immobility—glassiness. It is a fluid mirror which reflects sheet-lightning as well as somnolent trees and drugged serpents. It is a name which suggests water, music, light and torpor. It also sounds remote, securely pocketed, faintly exotic and, if it has any colour, is definitely white. (*Nightmare*, 165)

In *Black Spring*, Miller also ponders the question of the shifting, or sliding, signifier, where, for example, the word "Valparaiso" may mean something very different from what it is conventionally meant to signify: it can become a toothless "English cunt," an angel running his soft fingers over a black harp, or an odalisque with a mosquito net around her. All these are ultimately legitimate and ultimately different ways of reading a signifier (*Black Spring*, 30).

Of course, the signifieds brought about by this act of verbal "abundance," as I would call it, are signifiers themselves, since all words are metaphors, an endless series of signifiers, differing from others and deferred in infinity. Miller has his protagonist say in *Sexus* that the interpretations that are endlessly generated in fact contribute nothing, except to emphasise the significance of what appears unintelligible (*Sexus*, 195). Markedness, in other words, creates its own style, however "mad," however "chaotic," however

"monstrous" the chain of significance appears to be. In these waters, the text, and the reader with it, swim like a fish:

Such exquisite torture, this writing humbuggery! Bughouse reveries mixed with choking fits and what the Swedes call *mardrommen*. Squat images roped with diamond naras. Baroque architecture. Cabalistic logarithms. Mezuzahs and prayer-wheels. Portentous phrases...Skies of blue-green copper, filigreed with lacy striata; umbrella ribs, obscene graffiti. Balaam the ass licking his hind parts. Weasels sprouting nonsense. A sow menstruating.... (Nexus, 196)

The apparent dichotomy produced by "excessive" markedness, as in the case of the surrealist and the Millerian texts, has prompted some critics to use the term "heteroglossia" and "bitextualism" (Decker, 1996, 192, 193) or even "bistylistic antinomy" (Parkin, 1990, 215), "polystylism" (228), and "hybridisation" (237). It is true that Bakhtin's theories can shed some light on the seemingly discordant voice of the Millerian text: the monologic discourse of poetry, turned towards itself, single, centripetal, classical, standard, *official*, is here compared to the dialogic discourse of the novel—especially the modern one, turned towards a reader/audience, multiple, centrifugal, "chaotic," non-standard. In heteroglossia, the signifier is disconnected from the signified and, like an unleashed animal, is free to roam at will, since sooner or later someone—the reader, or *an ideal reader*, will catch it.

Another effect of the apparent dichotomy and the power of voice exercised by and through the text is the impression that words possess not only a life of their own, a "floating signifier," but that they are also magical and incantatory in nature (*Black Spring*, 147).

But what is the source from which the Millerian voice is thought to be produced, and does it spring from the same well as that of the surrealists? What is the role played by inspiration, dictation, and automatism in the construction of a voice of excess? The difference between the three terms is one of origin and of degree. As to origin, inspiration is traditionally thought to arise outside the author, automatism inside, and dictation in both, for the external agency, as well as the internal one, dictate to the writer. As to degree, inspiration is the mildest in terms of the "possession" experienced by the writer, whereas automatism is the strongest. Inspiration comes and goes and leaves the craftsman in almost complete awareness of the writing process. Dictation sets a real or imagined control over the writer who is dictated to by a usually unknown voice. Automatism makes of the writer a mere tool in the hand of a "power" surging from within and "possessing" him/her.

The dictation of surrealism, as I showed earlier in Part I, occurs on the level of automatism. I also discussed whether this automatism was real or imaginary, or whether it was language itself that played tricks on the craftsman. Millerian markedness, or the Millerian "voice," has been variously described, among other things, as being a result of inspiration, dictation, or automatism. What adds to the problem is that, unlike the surrealists who stressed the automatic nature of their text, both the author of this text and his persona speak of all three sometimes interchangeably. Inspiration in the Millerian text is sometimes equated with the surprise of spontaneity as he recalls the experience of his first "attack" when he became aware, for the first time in his life, that this was what is called a "flood of inspiration." It had come without any warning, without any palpable reason he could possibly think of. Was it because his mind had become a "perfect blank," and he was in that state when the reasoning faculty, laid at rest, had allowed him to contentedly drift with the tide (*Sexus*, 223)? Robert Ferguson speaks of an "aesthetic of spontaneity" in Miller which has for function the suspension of disbelief (Ferguson, 1991, 58). Markedness, to survive the inherent disbelief of the reader, has to be clothed in another garb, to be disguised, so to speak. However, when readers come face to face with the text, they are already in a suspension of belief situation and are, if not expecting, at least ready for the literariness or the ungrammaticality of this text. Spontaneity is a textual device that *smoothes* the reader's way and prepares a better reception of the markedness which generally follows.

Dictation in the Millerian text betrays the tension between the apparent immediacy of voice and the mediated, dictated nature of it. It is the next step in markedness, in that the reader is prepared to acknowledge the inspirational nature of the *fait de style*. Ibarguen sees Miller's dictation as an alternative to the "stream of consciousness" method (Ibarguen, 1989, 110) employed with varying success in modernist and post-modernist literature. Georges Wickes writes about *Tropic of Cancer*:

Written in the first person and the present tense, it conveys a strong sense of the speaking voice and the continuing moment. The narrator is named Henry Miller, and the technique is basically interior monologue, reporting successive states of mind and sensation as they occur, with all the fragmentary nature of the true stream of consciousness: a hodge-podge of incidents, memories, hallucinations, sights, ruminations, conversations, nightmares. There are frequent interruptions and shifts, back and forth in time, or altogether out of time into dream and fantasy. The disorder is intentional. (Wickes, 1966, 21)

The work of inspiration was shown earlier in Miller's passage from *Black Spring*, "The Angel is my Watermark," and I have said that, though an

exercise in the technique of dictation, it is mainly a parody of it, despite Wickes' belief that Miller was really possessed by the "dictation" going on in his head and that he "can only write down what is being dictated to him until finally it ceases, leaving him exhausted" (Wickes, 1966, 24). The dictated-to writer is likened to a medium in a spiritist *séance* who is typically drained of his/her psychic energy once the show is over and the spirit has made its appearance.

The output of such dictation, stylistically, is an accumulation of signifiers through echolalia, assonance and alliteration, onomatopoeia, a sometimes morbid repetition of syntactic structure, semantic incompatibilities (Hedges' "mismatches"), irregular punctuation, a loosening up of the bond between signifiers and signifieds, and a corresponding semantic impression of breathlessness and speed, so that the text's dictation is transferred to the reader. Interestingly, the power of dictation, like the muses, is given a female nature, and Miller can only obediently answer her (*Black Spring*, 59).

The relationship between the craftsman and his/her creation is here coloured with sexual overtones—as Breton's relationship with imagination, as shown in the preceding part, was slightly incestuous,—for the writer, in a kind of masochistic way, surrenders to the demands of a mysterious, aloof, and exacting princess who holds the keys to the verbal prowess—the *faute de style*—of the text. The princess divests her unlucky suitor from everything and leaves him stark naked, a "writing machine" oiled to work so perfectly as to transform him and the machine into one single entity (*Cancer*, 34).

Automatism is the third stage in the apparent surrender of the writer to the whims of the text. Balliet mentions the automatism of the "cadenzas" in *Tropic of Capricorn* and, as she does with most other aspects of Miller's text, ascribes full automatic status not only to Miller's marked passages but also to his unmarked ones: "Another surreal characteristic that flows through *Capricorn* is that of automatic writing. Not only are his surreal passages inherently automatic, but so are many of his realistic ones" (Balliet, 1990, 111). Just how Balliet is able to stylistically measure the "inherent automatism of a passage is not clear. What is more evident is that automatism—or the stylistic appearance of it, since it is paradoxical that the "voice" is dictated, i.e., the word implies a written version of an oral previous statement—creates a set of paradigms within the text that allows verbal constructs to behave as if the writer were not in control of the signifiers anymore. The writer, however, learns to produce the state of automatism almost at will.

Quite a discipline, to get words to tickle without fanning them with a feather or stirring them with a silver spoon. To learn to wait, wait patiently, like a bird of prey, even though the flies were biting like mad and the birds chirping insanely. Before Abraham was. *Be still, and wait the coming of the Lord!* Erase all thought, observe the still movement of the heavens!...What is more still than a mirror, the frozen glassiness of glass—yet what frenzy, what fury, its still surface can yield! (*Nexus*, 242–243)

What is paradoxical in this is that under the appearance lies the reality of the text's control: what seems to be the writer's wilful—and playful—manipulation of the three registers, the phonetic, the syntactic, and the semantic ones, in order to produce markedness, is in fact a genuine surrendering not to some unseen force, whether it is a muse, the "inner man," or the "voice inside," but to language itself, a surrendering, as I have said earlier, of the author to the dynamics of a text which strives after its own survival. The text's language plays a trick on the writer who thinks that he/she is playing a trick on the reader. In a way, automatism is then the ultimate production of the text, when the writer is "dead" and what is left is the infinite web of voices which constitute the Voice. What distinguishes this kind of automatism from the one envisioned by the surrealists is the shift from the more mechanical registers of phonetics and syntax to that of semantics. How this is achieved in the Millerian text is the object of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Although later on in life, as Gunther Stuhlmann writes, Miller would admit that the character in his book was him and not him at the same time (Stuhlmann, 1990, 107).
2. Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1990) is a superb example of the interaction between author, narrator, and persona in the realm of the text itself.
3. Henry Miller was, indeed, one of the most prolific letter writers.
4. The yearning to find a voice can be compared to Bataille's views in one of his essays on the mythopoetic recreation of man's ascent, "Mouth" (Bataille, 1993).

Chapter Nine

From Phonetic to Semantic Predominance: The Construction of Deviation in the Millerian Text

The surrealists' insistence on word games is proverbial and such proverbiality is, as I have amply shown in Part I, well founded. The games are designed to free the signifier from the signified and to highlight, by the same token, the potential of every person's inner essence to manifest itself. The image produced from the union of very distant elements, the expected surprise experienced by the encounter of similar-sounding phonemes, the re-shuffling of letters to produce new combinations, all these help the surrealist writers and their readers grasp the world around them in a new fashion. However, the problems facing phonetic markedness, as I showed at the end of the previous part on surrealism, are substantial.

The Millerian text's use of word games is, contrastingly, reserved, and confined to the "classical" tropes and other figures of style. This text is easily translatable despite the jargon used, nothing a good dictionary cannot cope with—except for some sheer invented words. Saturation is avoided by the spacing of short bursts of marked passages. Although Miller-the-author and Miller-the-hero praise the dadaists for the purity of their verbal inventiveness, we have yet to find a genuine dadaist passage in all the American author's works. Dada is admired by Miller for its spirit and for the courage it exhibited in the face of early twentieth-century rationalism and bigotry, but Tzara's plays and poems remain unique.

Syntactically, surrealism, and especially its predecessor, dadaism, are prone to flagrant markedness. If we recall Tzara's poem "Angeles" quoted earlier we see that the structural rules of the language are mercilessly flouted, and, likewise, poems by Breton exhibit, as a rule, strings of unconnected sentences. The impression that prevails upon reading such passages is that markedness is *cultivated* as a value per se, and recipes, tricks, and tips are passed on from one surrealist to another. Desnos is solemnly declared the knight of surrealism, the most advanced horseman, the most prolifically

endowed on the verbal plane. The Desnosian text is taken as model for future generations of surrealists, and all strive to attain the quickness and lucidity of his prowess.

Not so with Miller. The Millerian syntax is regular despite the dictation effect: all sentences are, grammatically, impeccable and, though complex, nothing stands out, except perhaps the richness of the diction and of the imagery. It is a giant and bold step to take to say that the Millerian syntax exhibits similarities with the dadaist or surrealist ones.

On the semantic level, surrealism definitely distances itself from dada. The surrealist image seeks a rapprochement between two extremely diverging elements and achieves its aim with superior skill. The dadaist image is almost nonexistent for the stress is laid on pure shock. The Millerian image, as we have seen, is more sophisticated, stylistically speaking, than the surrealist one. Let me illustrate with another three "like" phrases chosen randomly from various works by Miller:

I chew fat pieces out of my own melancholy and spit them out like roaches.
(*Sexus*, 272)

I felt like the chambered nautilus walking the sands of time. (*Plexus*, 31)

It was the way he listened, all agog, like a frog peering at you from the mossy edge of a pond... (*Nexus*, 110)

Comparing the above with the similar examples of "like" images from the preceding part, we are led to the conclusion that although great similarity exists between the two, the sememes used in Miller reflect significations that are found wanting in the French school, even if the syntactic construction may mislead by the resemblance. The surrealist analogy is, semantically speaking, self-referent. Nothing is imparted by that analogy. The distant elements have been very cleverly, very skilfully put together, have been rapproched, but nothing more. Mere mechanistic skill, if I may say, for the semantic import stops where the two elements unite to form the image. The image is appreciated, tasted, enjoyed for its dexterity, but then it is instantly forgotten, for it imparts nothing more.

Lautréamont's "beau comme" exhibits a slightly higher image-to-sememe ratio, for not only is the analogy pleasurable and surprising in its rapprochement effects to the reader, it also evokes associations and connotations, unlike the surrealist image which is mainly built on denotations and mere word-play, as I have amply shown in Part I. The words themselves are not pointers per se but behave as spark-producing mechanisms which give access to the "inner world."

Miller's analogy offers the highest image-to-sememe ratio: melancholy is chewed, it is fat for it has been feeding on the character's psyche, and when spat out it is transformed into pieces like black cockroaches, scurrying from one dirty place in search of another host. We could apply the same semantic signification-imparting to the remaining two examples and reach the conclusion that the Millerian analogy is only partially geared towards mechanistic purity; its main concern and function are genuinely semantic: the analogical image makes of rapprochement a point of departure, not a point of arrival, for subsequent meanings and levels of signification to be discovered by the reader.

To repeat: on the one hand, with dada at one end of the phonetic-semantic spectrum and Miller at the other, and with surrealism in-between, I have shown that the more decisive the movement away from pure sound towards semantic markedness, the more durable, the more self-preserved the text will be. On the other hand, while the dada text is saturated phonetically, and the surrealist text saturated both phonetically and syntactically, the Millerian one escapes saturation by adopting all three registers in varied proportions into its marked repertoire, ensuring thus its own survival. The mechanics of this highly economical strategy are based on a peculiarly Millerian construction of deviation. Three important considerations should be borne in mind when dealing with literary deviation:

First, it is a mistake to think that the status of deviation attaches itself to a word, a sentence, a turn of phrase, or a whole style permanently. Deviation is a fluid process which constantly undergoes fluctuations, as one feature can be deviatory today and standard usage next year. The battlefield which is the text allows for the voice to pass through multifaceted existences, one day as a hero and another day as a villain.

Second, it is the reader who decides whether there is deviation or not, for deviation is not intrinsic to a sound, a word, or a sentence.

Third, deviation is not the swerving away from some abstract norm, a "gold" standard of literature and language. As Riffaterre has pointed out, deviation is relative and co-existent with what is not seen as deviation, and with what is presented as non-deviatory by the author him-/herself. In other words, a text deviates not from a norm outside the text but from the norm already created by the writer of the text.

With this in mind, I am presenting a threefold approach to literary deviation which finds its best illustration with Miller: a text deviates from what is external to it, a text deviates from what is external and internal to it at the same time, and a text deviates from what is internal to it. The first

deviation I call inter-textual deviation, the second intra-textual deviation, and the third endo-textual deviation.

Inter-textual deviation is the most easily recognised kind of swerving away, for a norm that has been understood, imitated, and practised to perfection is seen as threatened by an "outsider" text which lays claims of legitimacy. The reaction of the reader is clear and swift: the renegade text is deviatory and is struck with anathema; a *vade retro satanas* response is seen as indispensable to exorcise the evil disguised inside the text. An instinctive measure taken by the reader-made-inquisitor is to try to make sense of the markedness despite the evil present, and a straightening-out reading is performed, a *translation* is effected as if specks of truth and order still prevailed within the disgraced and perhaps already excommunicated text. The word of the text is weighed against the word of the ancients and is found heretical and taboo. Symbolically, the culprit is burned at the stake and infamy attaches itself to its name forever.

The Millerian text, seen from the angle of inter-textual deviation, has suffered, especially with earlier critics, such a fate. It is "monstrous," "grotesque," "buffoonish," "nonsensical," etc. Ditto with the surrealist and the dadaist texts. The symbolist texts of Rimbaud and Baudelaire suffered a similar fate, when compared to the master key, the master mould erroneously supposed to be the standard. Another movement within inter-textual deviation is internal in nature, i.e., inter-textually deviatory texts are again compared to other deviatory texts and decreed either less or more deviational. One is tempted to compare the deviation of the Millerian text with that of the surrealist and the dadaist ones.

Intra-textual deviation is a special kind of inter-textual deviation. I have chosen the term "intra-textual" to denote the deviation of one text from another within the same authorial sphere, i.e., a Millerian text deviates from another Millerian text. An objection would be that an intra-textual deviation can be treated as an inter-textual one since both are texts, whether written by Miller or by some other author. The answer is that the two texts in an intra-text pair would deviate in features distinct enough to warrant investigation but not to the extent as to be treated as a completely different text either, for both would exhibit certain *faits de style* unmistakably belonging to the same style.

Other benefits of an intra-textual approach would be that one text would illuminate another and reveal how certain marked devices in one are turned into unmarked devices in another and vice-versa, and why certain textual situations prompted markedness in one whereas the same textual situations retained unmarkedness in another. Most essentially, marked

passages in one intra-text, if too obscure to be given adequate signification by the reader can be elucidated by the corresponding unmarked passage in the other intra-text. The intra-textual passages would act as mirrors, a kind of reproduction of the microcosmic signifier-signified sign unit on a giant level: *one passage would act as the signifier and the corresponding one would act as the signified, the "key" to signification*, and both, when taken together, would constitute the sign, the voice of the text, and here, one of the "keys" to Miller's "obscurity."

Riffaterre's notion that deviation does not occur relatively to an external norm but to one created by the text itself has prompted me to find a label for such an approach to deviation. I have called it "endo-textual deviation" from the Greek *endon*, "within." The text, especially the literary one, constantly creates *facts de style* the proliferation of which necessarily produces spaces of markedness and of unmarkedness (except in the case of saturation). The investigation of the relationship between these marked and unmarked spaces is endo-textual deviation. An objection to this theory is why not treat the endo-textual deviation like an intra-textual one, or vice-versa, since both texts are from the same author, and one would illuminate the other? The answer is that the memory span of the reader is limited by space and time, for he/she cannot have access, simultaneously and efficiently, to two sets of texts existing in two specific situations as easily as two texts existing in one situation, viz., in one book.

The advantages of this approach are that the succession mechanisms between marked and unmarked are more easily seen and thus better investigated, and the boundaries between the two better analysed. Since most literary texts are deviatory (or else they wouldn't be classified as "literary"), I propose that the more a text complies with the three levels of deviation I have mentioned, the richer it is in stylistic terms¹, and the more pleasure the reader will derive from constructing it.

My contention, stated earlier, is that the Millerian text is such a product since it presents deviatory instances on the three levels: inter-textually, it deviates from what is seen as the external norm and from other deviatory texts, in this case from dadaism and surrealism; intra-textually, *Plexus* and the later works—mostly written after Miller's return to the United States in 1940—provide the keys to the markedness of the other texts I have chosen to analyse; endo-textually, the Millerian text exhibits immensely relevant characteristics which will serve to highlight both the Riffaterrian concept of deviation and my own approach to Miller's stylistic importance. I will proceed now to show how the endo-text generates itself and insures convergence while avoiding saturation.

NOTE

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- 1 By "richer" is not meant "better," but more salient in stylistic features, thus more apt to be defined and classified

Chapter Ten

Spaces and Succession Mechanisms

The examination of the characteristics of Miller's intra-texts falls, unfortunately, outside the limits of this study, yet it is from the following *Plexus* intra-text that the sequencing, ordering, and placing of marked versus unmarked passages in the endo-text can be explained:

For a brief moment one experiences the same sort of vertigo as when the motorman deserts his post with the trolley in full flight. After that it is pure *volupté* [sic]. Surrender again. Surrender to the spell which has rendered the author superfluous. Immediately one's rhythm is retarded. One lingers before the verbal structures which palpitate like living houses... It may be a personage as innocuous as Sophie. It may be a question of large white goose eggs which will dominate the whole passage. No governing the cosmic fluid in which the events and situations are now bathed. The dialogue may become pure nonsense, astral in its implications. The author has made it clear that he is absent. The reader is face to face with an angelic sport. He will live this scene, this protracted moment, over and over again, and with a sharpened sense of reality verging on the hallucinatory. Only a little street—perhaps not a block long. Diminutive gardens tended by trolls. (228)

The endo-text, as I have explained above, is the set of texts within the one text that explains the marked-unmarked relationship that will be the hallmark of the language used by the writer. As with all co-existing double structures, it is imperative to investigate the nature of the bond between the two elements, the points where one set of *faits de style* gives place to the other set and the points where the initial dominant set takes back its place in the tempo of the text. The endo-text, in this respect, is more valuable than both the inter- and the intra-texts for it provides the clues to both sets *in situ*, without either the recourse to an outside norm (the "standard" norm of the reader and the norm created by other deviatory texts) or the recourse to an intra-text not always readily available to the reader. The endo-text is therefore at the centre of a sound stylistic study of deviation and excess.

Not all critics and researchers of the Millerian text have been keen on exploiting this concept to the full. James Decker, in his *Spiral Form and Henry Miller's Anecdotal Life*, dismisses any connections between the two sets and categorically writes that "Miller's dream sequences explode any residual pretense to linear narrative by unfolding in no recognizable pattern. They end just as abruptly as they begin" (Decker, 1996, 18–19), but he paradoxically ascertains that Miller's sequence is "triggered by a key word or phrase" which will make him suddenly stop the narrative's linear progression and "compose a mammoth sentence consisting of an inventory of nouns" (23). Decker, however, stops short of analysing the triggering effect, focusing instead on the end-product itself. Robert Ferguson, Miller's biographer, notices that passages characterised by "astonishing and haunting power" are usually placed at the end of his chapters and describes the unexpected change that takes place:

It is like waking suddenly to find oneself high on a mountain with no path in sight, nothing to indicate the means of ascent. A look back through the preceding pages to find the point of take-off will rarely succeed, and in the end one simply has to shrug and forge on, leaving behind all dull expectations of knowing exactly what is supposed to be happening. (Ferguson, 1991, 331)

I will presently try to show that the way to that "mountain" can be pointed at, as well as the way back to the "valley." As to knowing "exactly what is supposed to be happening," this will have to wait for the following chapters.

Deictics are words and expressions the references of which rely on the circumstances of the utterance and are understood only if the circumstances are known. Pronouns act as deictics for the nouns they refer to. There are time deictics and place deictics (Iromkin and Rodman, 1983, 190–191): deictic features anchor utterances in the context of space and/or time relative to the speaker or to the reader (example: "come here" where the addresser's position in space relative to that of the addressee has to be known first); in addition, they are the principal way in which focalisation occurs (Bradford, 1997, 61–63). Focalisation is here important for it acts as one of the stylistic devices used to great effect in the Millerian text in connection with endo-text pragmatics. David Crossen comes close to recognising the use of deictics in *Tropic of Cancer* but does not make the connection, associating them instead with various states of mind (Crossen, 1978, 99). Along with deictics, time and place words are used for the same effect, viz., the anchoring of the narrative in time and space. As an illustration, and to prove my point, each and every chapter of *Tropic of Cancer* without a single omission (except for page 76 where it is the *third* line) opens

up with deictics of time, place, or season. The recurrence of time and place focalisers is too regular to be disregarded or attributed to chance, especially since the same device is used with the same almost uncanny constancy in *Black Spring*, *Sexus*, and *Quiet Days in Clichy*. The endo-textual function of these focalisers is to bring back the text—and the reader—to the unmarked set of *faits de style*, to “firm ground,” to a safe anchoring place and time. It acts as a “breather” after the spell experienced by the marked passages and, thus, Ferguson’s remark about these passages’ position at the end of chapters reveals itself to be accurate: the chapter begins in focalised anchoring, accepts the set of marked features, and proceeds to restore its own unmarkedness at the beginning of the following chapter, providing a balance which respects convergence and avoids at the same time the fatal saturation process. Ibarguen, one of the very few critics to have been aware of this mechanism in Miller, notes with acumen that

Miller’s “veridic moments” are distributed throughout *Tropic of Cancer*. These moments tremble on the surface of the down-to-earth anecdotal prose, always threatening to race off with the narrative, such that one cannot neatly categorize sections of *Tropic of Cancer*—these parts anecdotal, those stretches diatribe. Without plot, this uncertainty as to when and where Miller will “let go” or come to a halt provides a facsimile of suspense. Nevertheless, one might roughly chart Miller’s changes of pace. His modulations into extended stretches of frenzied narrative tend to occur toward the end of the unnumbered and unnamed “chapters” of *Tropic of Cancer*. To venture as much is not to suggest that these “veridic moments” are distributed structurally... Rather, Miller’s verbal accelerations are allocated “economically,” as if the narrator were intent upon striking some ratio of anecdote to diatribe. (Ibarguen, 1989, 230)

The “suspense” created is of course the *imprévisibilité* (unpredictability) described by Riffaterre as the *sine qua non* of the determination of style. The pattern *has* to be broken by markedness in order to give birth to a unified and, ultimately, recognisable structure (Riffaterre, 1971, 65).

Now that I have shown how focalisers “surround” markedness and anchor the reader firmly before presenting the second set of features in the endo-text, I will proceed with the description of the “interstices” which mark the boundaries between the two halves of the Millerian structure. Miller equates the beginning of markedness with the beginning of sleep, or somnolence. He writes, Breton-like, of that state:

Before sleep, just as the eyelids close down over the retina and the unbidden images begin their nocturnal parade.... That woman in the subway whom you followed into the street: a nameless phantom now suddenly reappearing, advancing towards you with lithe, vigorous loins. (*Sexus*, 229)

This seems to be a metaphor for the way in which words and sentences undergo the inevitable transformation. The plain woman (unmarkedness, the plain word/style, a “nameless” entity) is metamorphosed into a lithe, supple, and inviting creature (markedness, the *faits de style*, and convergence). The change is instantaneous and stylistically significant, a bringer of surprise, delight and suspense. In another passage of *Sexus*, Miller is more explicit as to the in-between state which he equates with death:

I was no longer aware of this world but not yet in the other one... In fact, there was nothing comparable to thought going on. Nor was it dreaming. It was more like a diaspora; the knot was unraveling, the self was dribbling away. (235)

There was nothing comparable to thought going on. The interstices that exist between marked and unmarked and which form the endo-text are filled with stylistic features that are common to both sets. The stylistic *diaspora* occurs at the split moment when one text is preparing to leave and another preparing to enter or, to be more precise, when the same text is undergoing the process of being the same yet different: the stylistic features pertain to both unmarkedness and markedness. This crucial moment is metaphorically described as somnolence and is accompanied by common symptoms: a random succession of images, a feeling of tiredness, of floating. It also functions as a softening of the otherwise shocking transition between the two modes, yet not in a manner that would reduce the accompanying surprise. The following passage comes just before a very marked set in *Quiet Days in Clichy*.

On the window-sill an early bird was tweeting. Pleasantly, drowsily, I remembered sitting thus on Brooklyn Heights years ago... China now, that’s really far. Or Mozambique. Ducky, to drift everlastingly. It’s unhealthy, Paris. Maybe she had something there. Try Luxembourg, little one. What the hell, there are thousands of places, Bali, for instance. Or the Carolines. Crazy, this asking for money all the time. Money, money. No money. Lots of money... I got off my ass, yawned, stretched, staggered to the bed. (*Clichy*, 78–79)

The interstice having been filled, markedness can proceed, while paradoxically taking the reader unawares. Here I give the first two lines of the marked set, immediately following the above-quoted passage:

Off like a streak. Down, down, to the cosmocentric cesspool. Leviathans swimming around in strangely sunlit depths. (79)

In other places somnolence is replaced by another form of thinking closely allied, though opposite, to somnolence: philosophical cogitation. As in the case of somnolence, the reader is cut off from the semantic feature denoting action to one denoting thought¹ and is thus ushered into a twilight zone favourable to the markedness that follows. Here is an example of this stylistic process from *Tropic of Capricorn*:

Nothing is lousier and emptier than the midst of bright gaiety clicked by the mechanical eye of the mechanical epoch, life maturing in a black box, a negative tickled with acid and yielding a momentaneous simulacrum of nothingness. (96-97)

At that instant, just before the leap, action is quickly re-introduced to jolt the reader, in a stylistic process that joins the previous passage with what follows:

At the outermost limit of this momentaneous nothingness my friend MacGregor arrives...and with him is the one he was talking about, the nymphomaniac called Paula. (97)

Then the leap:

She has the loose, jaunty swing and perch of the double-barrelled sex, all her movements radiating from the groin, always in equilibrium, always ready to flow, to wind and twist, and clutch, the eyes going tic-toc, the toes twitching and twinkling, the flesh rippling like a lake furrowed by a breeze. (97)

This endo-text goes on for three pages and is brought to a halt by a double device: a time focaliser and the process of waking up:

Sunday morning the telephone wakes me up. It's my friend Maxie Schnadig... (99)

The mentioning of the complete names of his friends reinforces the process of anchoring in time and place. It tells the reader that things are back to normal, to the plainness of unmarkedness. Ferguson's "pedestrian" prose comes back, and the markedness that had insinuated itself, that had slipped through the interstices, has almost disappeared, leaving behind only traces. In the next chapter I will trace this process of insinuation as double-patterning, markedness and unmarkedness, and as another fundamental metaphor of endo-textual structure, the Apollo-Dionysian duality.

NOTE

1. Something which can be likened to Barthes' codes presented in *S/Z* (1996), namely, the proairetic (action) and symbolic (thought) codes.

Chapter Eleven

Double-Patterning, Markedness, and the Apollo-Dionysus Connection

At one and the same time I was leading two thoroughly divergent lives. One could be described as 'the merry whirl', the other as the contemplative life. In the role of active being everybody took me for what I was, or what I appeared to be; in the other role no one recognized me, least of all myself

Plexus, 109

There are three intimately connected binary structural threads in the Millerian text: the concept of markedness and unmarkedness, that of the double pattern, and finally that of the Apollo-Dionysus duality.

To briefly repeat what was said earlier in the introduction, Richard Bradford's notion of the double pattern is of crucial importance in the assessment of the Millerian text. It is very similar to Riffaterre's marked/unmarked pair but diverges in some interesting points. Bradford defines the double pattern as concerning "the relationship between those features of the poem which are exclusive to poetic writing and those which the poem shares with other linguistic discourses" (Bradford, 1997, 46). By way of clarification, he adds that the "stylistic features of a poem include devices and registers that bear allegiance both to the formal inheritance of the genre and to those elements which the poem shares with non-poetic discourses: the active relationship between these two poles is the double pattern" (95). Modernist writing has explored the limits of the double pattern to its fullest extent, and has brought about an unprecedented shuffling of the two sets of features which make up a stylistic structure. The two sets are roughly represented in two columns, one including the poetic function, the conventional register, literary language, and the diachronic axis, the other including the referential function, the cognitive register, functional language, and the synchronic axis (153). The relationship between

the two sets determines, according to Bradford, the general orientation of literature throughout history. He says:

Imbalances between these poles occur in pre-modernist writing: the eighteenth-century novel struggled to incorporate functional, non-literary styles within a single generic structure; Romantic poetics deliberately unsettled a routine and familiar balance between the conventional and cognitive registers. Modernism, however, involves much more radical shifts towards the left- or right-hand columns and unprecedented combinations of the two. (153)

This is interesting in that modernism is seen as "effectively the terminus of literary history," and that "the limits of the double pattern have now been established in literary texts" (166). Modernist writing is seen as the epoch in literary history that has dared go to the limits in experimenting not only with the two sets, but also with the way these interact, fuse together, or depart from each other. The quality of the resulting text will be judged according to the relation between the two sets, or the two "dimensions" of the double pattern (190).

We immediately notice two things: first, the stress is mostly laid on the "poem" as the battlefield where the double pattern confrontation is waged, and although Bradford devotes not a few pages to the history of novels, I can only wonder at the omission in both definitions. Although the double pattern is slightly more difficult to recognise as such in novels due to length considerations, it is nonetheless that same length which permits the slow but inevitable development of the double pattern in them. The poem works under time and space constrictions: the double pattern *has* to flagrantly appear in the space of a number of lines, or else it fails, thus the obviousness of two sets of *faits de style* easily perceived by the reader. In the novel, the text has none of the time and space restrictions that would rush a display of stylistic double patterning; it nevertheless achieves its goals as well as in poetry, and reaches deviation through the flouting of the mimetic features of the text. Second, Bradford's definition includes the double pattern in the category of inter-textual deviation, as is shown when he mentions "those features...which the poem shares with other linguistic discourses," a tacit embracing of the norm as being found either in an outside canon or in other texts.

This evaluative approach echoes Riffaterre's notion of *saturation* and *convergence*, although Riffaterre avoids, unlike Bradford, value judgements, holding stylistics within the realms of description and analysis and leaving, in a skilful move, evaluative pronouncement to his architectes/lectrices themselves. Bradford's approach is here in fact more akin to Spitzer's than

to Riffaterre's: evaluation is an inseparable feature of stylistic analysis. I have opted for the Riffaterrian approach for the reason that evaluation is indeed to be left to the architecteur/lectrice who, in the final analysis, is the repository of the text's signification and, eventually, of its meaning. Bradford's approach will be borne in mind while engaging in the "discovery procedures" and the interesting concept of "naturalization," or what he calls the *translation* of the various marked *faits de style* into graspable and/or intelligible semantic units.

How founded is this *translation* activity anyway? The existence of an inter-text, standardised and/or present in other texts; of an intra-text which provides one of many "keys" to the marked sets, and of an endo-text which, side-by-side with its unavoidable twin, completes the stylistic circle, all point out to a movement towards signification on the semiotic level, and not necessarily towards meaning. As such, *translation* is a valid and legitimate process indeed. The coming chapters which will deal in more detail with the characteristics of the Millerian text will adopt and incorporate both Riffaterre's and Bradford's approaches, bearing in mind their respective limitations singled out earlier.

Keeping with the notion of double-patterning, it is crucial to explore the Apollo-Dionysian dimension present in the Millerian text as it is of paramount importance in the elucidation of semantic markedness and excess. In this context, Miller seemed to have been aware of the connection when he wrote to his friend Durrell, in a letter dated October 15, 1948, about *The Rosy Crucifixion*:

There are two types always—one working with & in Chaos, the other with law, form, etc. No use comparing them or putting one above another—systole & diastole: Apollonian & Dionysian, what! (MacNiven, 1988, 225)

George Wickes has noticed Miller's "Dionysian, anti-intellectual, instinctive" bent (Wickes, 1966, 10), and Wallace Fowle, as early as 1944, commented on the Dionysian side of Miller:

The ardor of Dionysus and the wisdom of Apollo,—that is, the body and the spirit, the earth and the sun, woman and man,—have been united in the modern artist in remarkably even proportions. (Fowle, 1944, 37)

Norman Mailer was even more explicit in his depiction of the nature of the two sides in the writings of Miller:

Miller, his work embraced, which is to say swallowed in four or five weeks, and then re-read over another month or two, can sit in one's mind with all the palpability of a huge elm lying uprooted

in your backyard. The nobility of the trunk and the relations of the branches are all on the ground for you to examine and try to compare, not to speak of the rich nightmare of the roots and crawlers offering all their separate intimations of the peculiarities of tongues, as though we are about to learn how voices belong not only to the wind but to earth being pulled apart from itself. How slippery are some of those roots, and ripped up. Fibers of root-hair emerge from the soil like ideas drawn into wires. One hallucinates: every scent comes off every crotch of the roots—wholesale corruption may beckon here along with organic integrity. (Mailer, 1976, x-xi)

Miller is, in Mailer's words, a phenomenon. He is likened to a huge tree with all parts there to be examined by all, trunks and branches lying on the surface, exposed, clear, *unmarked*. The roots and crawlers offer the reader all the "peculiarities of tongues," the language of the underground, *marked*. The "corruption" of the roots mingles with the purity of the branches: organic unity is reached. The allusion to the sides of Miller's style is crystal clear. One side beckons to the light, the other to darkness, and both unite in the text. We are reminded here of surrealism and its grand aim of providing a reality that would unite the darkness of the night life with the clarity of daylight and wakefulness. Has Miller succeeded in achieving the balance without either sinking into utter unintelligibility or into plainness of style? Has he found the way to unite the two stylistic modes into one harmonious whole? This daunting endeavour to combine the opposites while yet providing the reader with enough response finds indeed a parallel in the mythical story of Dionysus in his struggle and ultimately in his union with Apollo.

The Greek version of the Dionysus myth has the famed Cadmos marry Harmonia and give birth to Semele. Semele falls in love with Zeus (or the opposite, since Zeus is known for his amorous prowess) and, under the treacherous guidance of Hera, Zeus' jealous wife, Semele asks to see Zeus in his true form. As a result she is struck by his awesome power and dies instantly. Zeus takes Dionysus, who hadn't been born yet, out of Semele's body and nurtures him inside his thigh. Hera tries again and again to kill the child but never succeeds, putting on him instead the curse of madness with whom he himself will curse—or endow?—his followers (Jeanmaire, 1978, 358–359).

Dionysus is thus called the "mad" (61), the "terrible and the soft" (228), and the "noisy and screaming" (242). Dionysus's madness is of a special kind: it takes possession of its followers and warns them that it is in fact madness to oppose reason to the bewitching power of Dionysus (85). The Maenads, the female officiants of the cult, gave their name to the word "mania" (60).

The cult of Dionysus in Greece was intimately connected with that of Apollo, who represented order, beauty, and reason. During the early days of Greek tragedy, when the Dionysiac mysteries were beginning to threaten the aboriginal ascendancy of Apollo, a compromise was reached in a division of labour between the two gods: Apollo became the patron of paeans, and Dionysus that of dithyrambs (187, 258). The Webster's definition of paean is "any song of praise, joy, or triumph" and "a hymn of invocation or thanksgiving to Apollo." That of dithyramb is "a Greek choral song or chant of vehement or wild character and of usually irregular form, originally in honor of Dionysus" and "any poem or other composition having similar characteristics, as an impassioned or exalted theme or irregular form." The mixture of paeans and dithyrambs made up a Greek tragic performance which was regarded as the culmination of classical performing art.

Nietzsche, in his *The Birth of Tragedy*, talks at length about the relationship of the two gods with Greek tragedy: the original Greek mind, as, for that matter, the mind of any other people, was awed by the cruelty, ruthlessness, and purposelessness of life. The realisation that suffering was the law of nature imposed too great a burden on the ancient psyche, and the tension created reached a point where a choice was to be made: either the complete surrender to the forces of destruction and randomness, and, consequently, to death and annihilation, or the finding of a substitute that would alleviate the pains of confusion. Apollo was born. Apollo served as the veil which dissimulated the face of Dionysus (Nietzsche, 1967, 41), the theoretical conception of the world as opposed to the tragic one (106). Apollo re-established what Dionysus was threatening to destroy by the blinding vision it imparted to mankind (127), and acted as a safety valve where the aspirations of order, lawfulness, beauty, and reason counteracted those of chaos, confusion, ugliness, and madness. Apollo is the rose precariously living over and above the thorns (43–45). Nietzsche's history of the birth of tragedy revolves around the duality of the Apollonian and Dionysian aspirations.

Greek tragedy is indeed the reconciliation of the two drives, the sometimes uneasy co-habitation of the two forces in the bosom of every vision of life, for reconciliation is not permanent peace, and the reader of *The Birth of Tragedy* cannot escape the feeling that Dionysus is given a more awesome power than his rival, always threatening to take over and drive the human mind to the madness of pure and unrestrained chaos. Apollo gave birth to the soothing, comforting, and solacing institution of organised religion, whereas Dionysus gave birth to the mysterious, dark, and frantic aspects of cults (Jeanmaire, 1978, 194).

The connection between the Apollo/Dionysus pair and the theories of Riffaterre and Bradford, and, consequently, the connection with Miller, is clear. The Millerian text is indeed the most straightforward illustration of the Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy and its ultimate fusion: where unmarkedness in the Millerian text takes on a narrative or discursive nature, markedness is translated into "visions," "cadenzas," and "pyrotechnics," in which stylistic features are re-organised and re-signified in order to bring about a semantic shock in the reader. The enlightenment of the norm—inter-, intra-, and endo-, is skilfully balanced by the revelation of deviation. An illustration of the co-habitation of the two modes of writing is to be found in Miller's "Scenario" piece again, where the two principal actors, Mandra and Alraune, are the embodiments, respectively, of Apollo and Dionysus:

A room in the house, furnished in Moorish style. Mandra is seated in a gorgeous high-backed chair, like a throne. Alraune is pacing back and forth. There is a huge divan with heavy, billowy pillows...Alraune is dressed in a long flowing sheath-like gown which gleams like patent leather and which reveals the heavy curves of her body. Her pantherish strides are emphasized by the sweeping spread of her gown which encircles the richly-brocaded carpet in voluptuous waves...The steady splash and moan of the breakers, quicker and quicker transitions from dress to beach, from beach to dress, the waves pounding, the eddies flowing back and staining the sand—all synchronized with Alraune's feversh bounds, her insistent animal thrusts, her sexual advance and retreat upon Mandra (*Selected Prose II*, 436–437)

Alraune is Dionysus exhaling and exuding his animal, primitive force, like the waves of the primeval ocean, over the besieged Apollo, enthroned and surrounded by riches but unable to defend himself, just as unmarkedness stands defenceless against the assaults of markedness. But as with the legend, where mankind is born out of the ashes of the Titans and out of the specks of the Dionysian body, the text is, ultimately, the mixture of both modes. In "Scenario," the story ends with the voluptuous union of the opposites:

Alraune and Mandra sitting side by side in a gold chariot which is aflame. Alraune and Mandra exchanging amorous glances, touching each other lightly, their lips heavily rouged, their eyes painted. Alraune and Mandra bending over each other voluptuously in a long drawn-out kiss. Alraune and Mandra in each other's arms, pressing each other lasciviously, their hair entangled, their feet entwined. Alraune and Mandra sitting in the chariot ecstatically, their hair swarming with moths and butterflies, their bodies enveloped in a transparent veil of peacock plumes. (455–456)

As to whether this union symbolised by the Tarot-like arcane of the Chariot is equitable and fair, the sexual overtones, the serpent-like imagery, the recurrent repetition of the names of the two characters with Alraune-Dionysus first, leave no doubt that it is Alraune who has won Mandra to her side, i.e., that any union of the "mad"/marked with the "reasonable"/unmarked is achieved by the Dionysian taking over the Apollonian.

Another aspect of the Maenadic cult with parallels in the Millerian text is the ritual of *sparagmos* and *omophagia*, namely, the dismemberment and tearing of the sacrificial victim and the eating of its raw flesh. The corresponding legend relates that Juno kidnaps the child Dionysus and gives him to the Titans who immediately seize him, cut his body to pieces, lightly cook them, and eat them except for the heart which is recovered by one of the daughters of Jupiter. She takes the heart to the father of the gods as proof against the deed of the Titans and Jupiter, in a raging fit, has them all slaughtered as punishment (Jeanmaire, 1978, 379). Out of the ashes of the Titans the human race is born and within it portions of Dionysus. This horrible incident became the basis for what was known as the "passion" of Dionysus (80).

The *sparagmos*, also known as *diasparagmos*, was re-enacted by the Maenads, the "mad" female followers of Dionysus, in a collective and brutal seizing of an animal, usually a fawn, and its tearing into pieces with naked hands (175). Indeed, "Scenario" depicts Alraune and Mandra as witnesses to a *sparagmos*:

Out of the dead trees there pours a stream of animals and the animals are pure white, every one of them. The revellers commence to fornicate with the animals. After they have fornicated they commence to kill the animals; then they fall on one another and with knives and teeth and nails they tear one another apart. The earth becomes one huge vomit of blood...Not a sound comes from the street except this weird unearthly chant [a flute]. The people are rushing by like ghosts, making no sound except a moaning as of the wind...Mandra and Alraune are fleeing before the mob, their capes flying, their hair streaming wild. (*Selected Prose II*, 444-445)

The Millerian overtones of the Dionysian "sparagmatic" passion are clear, both structurally and especially semantically: the marked, Dionysian, dithyrambic text is *dismembered* and torn to pieces. The syntactic order of Apollonian unmarkedness is thrown into confusion: the sentences are either much shorter than usual, mere flash descriptions, or are much longer than usual, containing complex embedded phrases with multiple structural and

grammatical levels and structural repetitions and parallelisms, as the various examples used above clearly show.

Semantically, the Dionysian *passion* is reflected in *The Roly Crucifixion* trilogy. The narrator, Henry Miller, undergoes a dismemberment and a tearing to pieces by the Great Mother in her twin manifestations of the power of life and of the eternal female. As I will show later in more stylistic detail, Miller has his *passion*, his crucifixion, his descent to the world of the dead, a journey downward to the bottom of individuality, out of which he eventually rises in order to become a full individual. The title of the trilogy itself is, of course, informative as to the nature of the crucifixion: like Dionysus, Miller goes to hell but emerges victorious, joyous, and noisy, "terrible" and "soft" in his passage from markedness to unmarkedness: he carries with him the epithets of the Greek god himself.

Omophagia is, as we have seen in the legend, the eating of the raw flesh of Dionysus in remembrance of the deed of the Titans. The Millerian text exhibits a similar process: the text is "eaten raw," without its being cooked—or very little. What this means is that after the text is dismembered stylistically, it is "eaten," or presented in its raw form, i.e., on the level of signification, the level of the interplay of signs among each others. After the external vestments of unmarkedness are stripped off, what is left is the raw, primeval form of the word. This process is especially prevalent in dadaism and in surrealism: when the word is given complete freedom, when reason ceases to exert its overwhelming influence, a new order of imagery and of metaphorical relationships is created. The "raw" text is correlated with the "inner man" of the surrealists and with the bursting of phonetic and syntactic enthusiasm of the dadaists.

The vociferous shouts of the Maenads, the "évoés" (Jeanmaire, 1978, 94) are echoed in Tzara, in Breton, and in their respective followers. It is also interesting to note that the Titans did not eat their sacrificial repast *completely raw* (379). What this means is that markedness must still retain some bonds with unmarkedness lest it becomes *unintelligible*, or, to keep the eating analogy, *unpalatable*. The dynamic nature of both sets of features, i.e., markedness being always very slightly unmarked, and unmarkedness always very slightly tainted with markedness is, in this context, remarkable.

Thus eating or devouring of the Millerian text has not escaped the more astute critics: David Crossen, in his thesis, *Apollinian [sic] and Dionysian: The Act of Myth-Making in Henry Miller*, has studied the relationship between the myth of Dionysus and Henry Miller. His work sheds interesting lights on the myth and how it applies to Miller, but he neglects to offer a stylistic equivalent to his approach, sticking instead to psychoanalytic and thematic

associations. While very valuable to the literary historian and to the psychoanalyst, it omits, probably due to space and time restrictions, the paramount issues of textual features that make such psychoanalytic and mythical themes so prevalent. However, Crossen hits the mark when he says that "Miller seeks to put a name on everything, to denominate and then to devour and hence to know. He understands life as a sacrament, an evolving hieroglyph" (Crossen, 1978, 57) and that *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* display both an insatiable appetite for words, which reflects years of artistic starvation, and an appetite for food and sex which reflects years of real hunger (94).

As can be seen, the stylistic, or, here, the lexical, element is a mere tool in the hand of the author/narrator and, though Crossen's observation is pertinent, the approach misses the double patterning of the language. Miller indeed "eats" the words of the lexicon symbolically by learning them, almost by heart, and gulping them every day: beside his daily programme was a big sheet of paper on which were listed the exotic words he was trying to annex to his vocabulary. The only problem he faced was how to incorporate these new words to his texts without having them "stick out like sore thumbs" (*Plexus*, 43).

Miller in many of his passages—the most memorable of which enumerates, almost with incantatory power, the traditional dishes he used to enjoy as a child (*Black Spring*, 103–104)—not only eats the succulent food he is describing with relish, but also devours the words themselves, taken as they are, raw in their pristine original signification, in a Rabelaisian gusto seldom found anywhere. Parkin rightly draws the connection between food and the naming of it and calls the process a "verbal banquet" in which the narrator is free for a brief moment from the constraints of the narrative—or, better to say, *because* of the narrative—and can stroll leisurely here and there with no textual preoccupations except the gazing at what he/she is witnessing (91). The Millerian text is inviting the reader to partake of the feast of words, for it is indeed a verbal banquet where the dishes offered are a plethora of nouns, and the reader, unawares, is tasting not food but lexical items.

Parkin also mentions a common denominator between Miller and Rabelais: the extravagance in the lists and catalogues and the eating connection make the two writers revel in a very peculiar sense of wastage (Parkin, 1990, 160). Nietzsche mentioned the need for *mesure* exemplified and maintained by Apollo, a *mesure* that keeps the ugly face of truth from appearing. Truth, in fact, pertains to *demesure*, to the laying bare the foundations of the tragic sense of life. With *demesure* comes an attitude that

bespeaks incest and sacrilege, where everything is justified (Nietzsche, 1967, 72) in the name of the divine mania.

I add to these a justification for sacrifice and excess, the sacrifice being already present in the ritual act of sparagmos and omophagia, and the excess in the letting go of all rational restraints in the exercise of the Dionysian fury. In this context, Georges Bataille, a French thinker closely related to the surrealists (though he later turned against them and brought to his camp most of the early followers of Breton), provides the researcher of the Millerian text with an interesting picture of sacrifice and excess: the sacrificial victim, in my case the text, is lost along with the sacrificer, i.e., the reader. Bataille's notion of expenditure is also remarkably mirrored in Miller's text when his hero finds unequalled pleasure in the climax of the sexual act, when ejaculation is likened at times to "a steady flow of sperm from the Mithraic Bull" (*Capricorn*, 212). Mythology and the excess of sex are combined to provide for unparalleled semantic suggestiveness. Furthermore, this process is translated onto the text itself and, as Goodwin suggested, this situation "conveys a new poetic conceit for ejaculation as expenditure" (Goodwin, 1992, 308). The Millerian text "ejaculates," as it seems, in those moments when the discourse is at its most marked, when the tension brought about by convergence reaches a peak. Excess and expenditure are preceded and followed by relief periods in which the text slowly builds up towards another climactic moment. The Mithraic bull is the text which is sacrificed and born again.

Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons explains that the reader also both loses his/her life, symbolically, and gains the experience of the sacrifice itself, in a paradoxical situation where gain and loss exist side by side in an uneasy situation to say the least (Boldt-Irons, 1995, 91). The text's display of words is changed into a "hecatomb of words" (94) where this text becomes a huge battlefield littered with sacrificed bodies. The words are *killed* by extracting from them the power to mean, by an *annulment* of signs (94), and Bataille's notion of the expenditure of energy seeking an outlet acquires here increased importance. Life renews itself by periodically expending the energy it has kept and accumulated in moments of rest and inaction. Yet, this accumulated energy cannot be controlled for long and is bound to explode in some way or another, but always in a display of excess and extravagance.

We are here reminded of the surrealist image being the product of two different elements which produce a spark. We are also reminded of the "economic" distribution of "visionary" passages in Miller, in a way that simultaneously tries to explode the structure and attempts to safeguard it in

a precarious balance of forces. The connection with the double pattern is also clear: modernist writing is especially geared towards excess in one form or another, in sudden shifts towards one or the other poles of the text. Excess violently "maltreats" the words in such a way as to produce pangs of suffering and of ecstasy in the reader, with the added torment of not knowing which is which. The reader experiences the same confused emotions as those of a crowd witnessing a public execution: the anticipated horror is counterbalanced by a sinister need to see blood spillage and wastage. Markedness, in a perverse way, both attracts and wards off the unwary reader of the text. Expenditure, in all the attraction of its uselessness, is a powerful player in the textual game.

Again, the connection with Miller is more than obvious: beyond the search for meaning there lies a somewhat perverse pleasure in exhibiting words, plenty of them, raw and naked, to the perusal of the reader. The Dionysian victim is brought to the text, stripped naked, dismembered, and eaten—almost—raw, to the pleasure of both the text and the reader, all happening in an almost voyeuristic sado-masochistic triangle since all the participants are victims and sacrificers at the same time. The quasi-morbid fascination exerted by dadaist, surrealist, and Millerian textual markedness provides a good example in point.

The voyeuristic aspect of the Apollo-Dionysian text as seen in the dadaists and the surrealists in general and in Miller in particular, along with a sense of pleasure and of voluptuousness, and, ultimately, with the ensuing confusion as to whether Miller as represented in his text is a demon (Dionysus) or an angel (Apollo), will be investigated in connection with Roland Barthes' notion of textual eroticism in the next chapter.

Chapter Twelve

Pleasure and Duplicity in the Millerian Text

Dionysian art...wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomena, but behind them.

Nietzsche, 1967, 104

Nietzsche's proposition is that although the Apollonian veil is flung over the horrors of raw life symbolised by Dionysus, it is to this raw perception of reality that the would-be initiate has to turn in order to come to terms with the tragic sense of existence that plagues common mortals. Reason cannot permit the wallowing into the pleasures and voluptuousness of the world, just as organised religion stands strongly against the pleasures of the flesh. Cults, on the contrary, encourage their followers to indulge in those excesses—of the flesh and others—which bring unbridled and instantaneous gratification. The longer people subdue their hidden passions, the stronger the counter-reaction will be.

The Freudian parallels are well-known: the repression of the instinctive drives by the ego and the super-ego leads to a proportional surcharge of id-energy that is bound to discharge itself sooner or later. Bataille's excess theory comes to mind as well: expenditure is triggered as a reaction to utilitarian concerns and politico-economic measures. When the useless kind of expenditure explodes, it is accompanied by excess, violence, blood-letting, and sacrifice. Surrealist and dadaist textual strategies have taken into consideration this bipolar process. It is only when reason is silenced that the "inner man" is free to talk and write, and the dadaist position in particular is characterised by its violent and iconoclastic rejection of all forms of control.

Stylistically speaking, the thin thread that connects the "Apollonian" mode to the "Dionysian" one is mirrored in the equally thin thread that connects the signified to the signifier, for if Apollo is reason, order, and justification, Dionysus is passion, chaos, purposelessness and thus dissemination. When the Dionysian mode takes over, the signifiers are turned loose and are

free to behave as they want, regardless of the semantic bond that existed before the "coup d'état" took place. Yet, as was hinted at in the preceding chapter, although periods of disorder bring with them an increased sense of lawlessness and sometimes chaos, a certain almost indiscernible feeling of *pleasure* persists even long after order (unmarkedness) is restored.

This is especially the case in Miller more than in the surrealists or the dadaists, for the simple reason that it is the endo-text which allows the reader the to-and-fro movement between the two orders of textual mode, and lets him/her savour the insidious game played by the text on its reader(s). In this respect, Steven Foster notices the random motion of language in *Tropic of Cancer*, and adds that the Millerian images are not only strange, but they are also "never fully explored" (Foster, 1964, 197). The suggestiveness of images like the following may have prompted Foster's comment:

A man is standing against a wall with an accordion strapped to his belly; his hands are cut off at the wrists, but the accordion writhes between his stumps like a sack of snakes. (*Cancer*, 70)

What surprised Foster is that the immediate continuation of the above passage seemingly bears no relation to what preceded it. A new paragraph is inserted beginning with the following words:

Something was needed to put me right with myself. Last night I discovered it: *Papiri*. (70)

I have already shown in the previous chapters the dynamics of textual succession in Miller, but we can for now share Foster's impression that Miller is too vague and hazy to be understood:

Sometimes, though we might enjoy identifying with Miller, we are hard put to comprehend exactly why we should. The most naive of questions can also be the most devastating when asked of this particular novel [*Tropic of Cancer*]: Why does the hero want to be the way he is or say the things he says? The answer might be that Miller's work always projects itself into a twilight zone where no values are fixed. (Foster, 1964, 207)

But *does the text have to bring meaning with it?* Such is the question. Hugo Manning quotes Miller pondering in *The Books in My Life*: "You write, others write me likewise, that my work should be disseminated, that it contains something of value to the world. I wonder" (Manning, 1990, 99). What Henry Miller the writer was maybe not aware of was that his works would

be subject not to physical dissemination but to the textual, post-structuralist *dissemination* of meaning, and it is my intention to show that the Millerian text is more prone than any other—and here by "any other" I mean dada and surrealist texts—to the dissemination of meaning so conducive to reader participation and, ultimately, to reader enjoyment.

The playful communication with the text was explored by Barthes in his *S/Z*, where, amidst the codes and the innumerably *useless* lexia, he writes:

Thus it would be wrong to say that if we undertake to reread the text we do so for some intellectual advantage (to understand better, to analyze on good grounds): it is actually and invariably for a ludic advantage: to multiply the signifiers, not to reach some ultimate signified. (Barthes, 1996, 165)

The game of hide-and-seek between the signifier and the signified is at its best in the Millerian text where it is transposed to another level: not only is the ludic activity on the axis of the marked text but it is also found in the endo-text where the first set, markedness, acts as a giant signifier, and the second set, unmarkedness, acts as another giant signified. To clarify, the marked set, when taken at the level of the text, is a signifier which serves as a pointer to the unmarked set of the text. The pair marked/unmarked becomes the pair *signifier/signified*, and the whole text becomes the *sign* of the Millerian voice. This *mise en abyme*, the kaleidoscopic interplay of signs, is what *disseminates* the Millerian text.

From the playfulness of the text to the pleasure experienced in the text is but a tiny step. Barthes writes in his *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

Different from secondary sexuality, the sexiness of a body (which is not its beauty) inheres in the fact that it is possible to discern (to fantasize) in it the erotic practice to which one subjects it in thought (I conceive of this particular practice, specifically, and of no other). Similarly, distinguished within the text, one might say that there are *sexy sentences*, disturbing by their very isolation, as if they possessed the promise which is made to us, the readers, by a linguistic practice, as if we were to seek them out by virtue of a pleasure *which knows what it wants*. (Sontag, 1993, 422)

Sexiness is not beauty; likewise, the order of a text, its Apollonian geometry, is not necessarily conducive to pleasure, for in the very confusion of signs in the Dionysian code the reader is left to fantasize the textual "erotics" of his/her choice, to move from signifier to signified in almost unfettered freedom. The "sexiness" of a sentence possesses the promise of non-decidability which at the same time puzzles and flatters the reader who is

face-to-face with a sentence, a turn of phrase, an image, which offers itself to all yet gives to each what they want.

"Jabberwhorl Cronstadt," in *Black Spring*, is maybe the best example in English-speaking literature of the play of the text with the reader:

He lives in the back of a sunken garden, a sort of bosky glade shaded by whiffletrees and spinozas, by deodars and baobabs, a sort of queasy Buxtehude diapered with elytras and feluccas. You pass through a sentry box where the concierge twirls his mustache *con furioso* like in the last act of Ouida. They live on the third floor behind a mulioned belvedere filigreed with snaffled spaniels and sebaceous wens, with debentures and megrims hanging out to dry. (*Black Spring*, 131)

With the help of the Webster's, let us enjoy our deciphering of the passage. At first sight (my first reading, in this case, and I assume that it is also the case of the reader), it is just the description of a building hall or entrance, and it seems there are a lot of flower and plant names. Mistake! Miller and his text are cheating the reader like no one has ever cheated anyone before: a "whiffletree" is not a tree at all, but a crossbar used to harness horses; "spinozas" don't exist at all, it is just a phonetic echo or paronomasia (the use of similar-sounding words, or words similarly connected etymologically) of "mimosa;" "Buxtehude" is solely the name of a Danish composer; "elytras" is the plural of "elytron" which is the forewing of flying insects; and "feluccas" are small sailing boats. To add insult to injury, "deodars" are Himalayan cedars, and "baobabs" grow only in Africa; "snaffled spaniels" can either be "chained" or "stolen," but certainly not filigreed, "wens" are tumours and can certainly be "sebaceous" but definitely not filigreed, "debentures," which are the bars of windows, may refer to "devantures," or shop-fronts, and "megrims," which means in fact "migraine" or a "caprice," might refer to "megaron," a kind of building used in ancient Greece. More? The use of the personal pronouns is decidedly marked: who is the "He" at the beginning, Jabberwhorl Cronstadt? Then the "you" introduces the reader into the game, whereas the "they" imports another unknown element in the text. The title of the piece itself is "Jabberwhorl" and introduces the (un)wary reader to the circular (whorl) feature of the lexicon (jabber). It is true that such a passage is not the norm in Miller's writing, yet the Jabberwhorl piece sets the pace for the omnipresent game taking place in the Millerian text.

Indeed, this remarkable *tour de force* played on the reader exemplifies Barthes' effect of the writerly text on the reader. One can read with perfect contentment the above passage and never know that a "sexy" sentence, to

use Barthes' term, has been skipped. Or one can immensely enjoy the word-play and savour the skilfulness employed. Barthes speaks of the "confusion of languages" which brings *jouissance*—sensual pleasure,—a pleasure that seeks its origin in the incompleteness of discourse (Barthes, 1973b, 9–10). The pleasure text is one which is made up of *spaces, unexpectedness, a texte babil* (11–12)—a text that looks and sounds like the words uttered by toddlers,—stuttering, undecided, unclear. As in strip-tease, it is not the naked body of the performer which is the focal point of attention, otherwise, she/he would come to the scene already naked.

The dada text, and the surrealist one to a lesser extent, are *not* sexy. They may be shocking, they may be, by some stretch of imagination, beautiful, but they are definitely not sexy, for the *naked body* is exhibited immediately. As I have mentioned earlier, it is only Aragon and, sporadically, Breton, among the surrealists, who have approached Miller in his *sexy* use of the double pattern. In the Millerian text, the discourse begins fully clothed (unmarked, Apollonian), then a shirt is unbuttoned for a minute (marked, Dionysian), then buttoned again; after a few passages, the shirt is thrown away and the naked flesh appears, but not for long. The *suspense of sexiness* is at its strongest, which might explain the frustration not only of readers of Miller but also, interestingly, of his critics.

Indeed, as frustrated voyeurs or as a frustrated audience in a strip-tease show, the critics rave at Miller yet pursue him and his text all the same, such is the power of the *show*. Barthes speaks about the *edges* of the text of pleasure: it is not the passages themselves that count as much as the edges, the cuts, the yet-unfilled interstices experienced when the two texts come together. Taking his lead from the Marquis de Sade, Barthes writes:

Sade: the pleasure of reading obviously comes from certain ruptures (or from certain collisions): antipathetical codes (the noble and the trivial, for example) enter in contact; pompous and ridiculous neologisms are created; pornographic messages mold themselves into sentences so pure as to be taken for grammatical examples. As the theory of the text says: the language is redistributed. Indeed *this redistribution is always made by cutting*. Two edges are traced: one good edge, conforming, plagiaristic (it is a matter of copying the language in its canonical state, as it was fixed by the school, by good usage, by literature, by culture), and *another edge*, mobile, empty (apt to take any contours), which is never but the locus of its own effect: there where the death of the language is glimpsed. These two edges, *the compromise they put to play*, are necessary. Neither culture nor its destruction are erotic, it is the crack of the one and the other which is. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable instant, impossible, purely *romanesque*, which the libertine tastes at the end of a bold move, cutting the rope which hangs him, at the very moment of his pleasure. (Barthes, 1973b, 14–15)

To rephrase, it is neither the marked, nor the unmarked words themselves that are the locus of pleasure: it is neither culture, i.e., the Apollonian, the norm, good usage, nor destruction, i.e., the Dionysian, dada and to a certain degree surrealism, that bring about this moment of perverse self-oblivion which seizes reader and voyeur alike upon seeing the "crack," the place where deviation and non-deviation meet for a fraction of a second—a few lines—and not more. It is the *moment* when the *seams* are glanced which constitutes the erotic instant. Only the Millerian text can achieve this scintillating, shivering, quivering moment which can solely be brought about by the endo-text.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that it is only through a narrative structure that the "crack" can be made apparent, and thus is where the Millerian text clearly takes over when compared to the surrealist one. The "crack," the "fissure," the *moment*, in fact, when the sequentiality of a narrative is broken and the marked image appears, is a *sine qua non* prerogative of narrative. Were it not for this steady flow, episodic images, as in the case of surrealism, would only *pile up*, add vertically without ever touching upon the horizontality of an image which spills, as it were, onto its adjacent borders. Going back to Todorov's definition of the fantastic—that *moment* in the reading process, a *moment* engineered as well by the text—it is clear that the Millerian discourse sustains the reader in a state of utmost *stylistic* and *structural suspense* throughout the narrative by the very play between markedness and unmarkedness¹. Todorov's fantastic and Barthes' eroticism are skilfully blended in Miller.

Initially a "bastard wrestler," Miller doubles here as a juggler in his handling of the two modes, and as an acrobat in walking the tightrope of the fantastic, forever oscillating between two states, yet never complacently resting in any one. The reader, as the audience in that virtual arena/circus, follows and enacts the performer's motions in a superb show of synchronicity. It is here that the writerly nature of the Millerian text shines through: the wrestler, the juggler, the acrobat, all three are so much intertwined with their respective audiences that it is not far-fetched to say that with each surprise, with each unpredictable move, with each undecidability, the audience-reader is *writing* his/her own story, his/her own text out of that *moment* in the very narrative-like sequence of the performers.

Far from leading the reader by the hand, this writerly text offers, in the *imagerial hiccup*s in its sequentiality, spaces to fill. Alfred Perlès, in a letter to Lawrence Durrell, accurately described the effect produced:

Henry's work, in its ensemble, strikes me as a huge crossword puzzle which can only be solved correctly if solved differently by each of his serious readers. Our

job is to give them the clues, the 6 across, and 3 down, etc. But they must fill in the words themselves... (Perlès, Durrell, and Miller, 1959, 268)

The crossword puzzle, clearly, is the text's inherent structure waiting to be filled by the reader. But a subtle difference exists: the solution is not set in advance, since this very special puzzle can only be solved, paradoxically, differently by each reader. The *quantum physics* of the Millerian text is thus established in an indeterminacy that is to be settled separately by each reader.

Thus it is of not much use, in a Barthean approach to Miller, to speak about meaning, or to search for one, as it is not very useful to ask about the meaning of the performance of the wrestler, the juggler, or the acrobat. The pleasure text is there because it is *useful in its uselessness*, a gift which expects no gift in return, surpassed only by the pleasure it bestows on the reader. Reading is a ludic activity, as mentioned before, a pure multiplication of signifiers where no ultimate signifieds can be reached (Barthes, 1996, 165). The value of the Millerian text resides in enhancing the reader's pleasure at being the target of textual "strip-tease" and at the same time the producer of a text where the signifiers, without cutting off their last mooring point with the signifieds as in dada, are the masters of the game, albeit for a few moments. As Barthes says in a memorable sentence: "This is the pleasure of the text: value moved to the sumptuous rank of signifier" (Barthes, 1973b, 103). The value of the text does not reside in what it *means*, in the signified, but in the signifier itself. The writerly text and, by the same token, the Millerian one achieve this metamorphosis with gusto.

With the Millerian text firmly ensconced in its writerliness, with the triune thread of markedness-unmarkedness, double-patterning, and the Dionysus-Apollo connection incorporated structurally, and with the triad of inter-text, intra-text, and endo-text explored, it is now time to embark on the more practical side of this stylistic study: the Riffaterrian notion of the inter-connection of stylistic and thematic features will provide me with a backbone in the continuing investigations into the excesses of the Millerian image.

NOTE

- 1 As James Goodwin explains, Miller was fond of using the "gnomic artist" device which is, put in simple terms, the use of the simple past tense which gives the persona "great mobility in relation to any chronological or narrative order of events" (Goodwin, 1992, 303-306).

Chapter Thirteen

Macro-Grounds, Touchstones, and Matrices

I introduced in Part I the concept of macro- and micro-grounds in order to provide an adequate model for the confusion reigning in connection with the surrealist metaphor. Of the three components of the metaphor, only two have been recognised and exploited to the detriment of the third, the ground of the image. I identified a major semantic field which I called the macro-ground, and a variant of the same semantic field which I called the micro-ground. This model is valid for the wider purpose of the surrealist metaphor, for it is broad enough to account for the different images generated. It is also useful in that context since it covers more than one actual manifestation of surrealist or automatic writing: the model has to account for the idiosyncratic variations present in different text-generators, or writers, coming from different directions and bringing with them different and differing intertextual backgrounds.

The macro-ground model, with all its pertinence, however, is to be replaced, or, better to say, augmented and reinforced by another blueprint that will take into consideration the specificity of the Millerian text while at the same time providing for a yardstick with which to compare corresponding—if any—dada and surrealist texts.

With all investigations of the mechanics of imagery, one has to deal, sooner or later, with the delicate question of meaning and signification, i.e., how the original and principal idea is transferred to its stylistic representation, and how much validity can be ascribed to a logocentric system where the theme is seen as prior to its linguistic sign. Since a theme is itself a unit structurally similar to a unit in a grammar of language, how can it be translated again into a phoneme or, in this context, into a grapheme? And to what extent can the writer control the flow of the text which, eventually, will beget its own power of pleasure-production and game play with the reader? Finally, can a disembodied first idea be put as a question to the text? Miller-the-narrator describes the anguish of meaning as it confronts the field of the text:

Would I be able, on a sheet of paper, to exfoliate in all directions at once? Was it the purpose of art to stagger from fit to fit, leaving a bloody hemorrhage in one's wake? Was one merely to report the 'dictation'—like a faithful chela obeying the telepathic behest of his Master? Did creation begin, as with the earth itself, in the fiery bubble of inchoate magma, or was it necessary that the crust first cool? (Secus, 226)

Can the original idea, Riffaterre's first item in his extended metaphor model, "exfoliate" in all directions? Are we, as critics, to follow the "bloody hemorrhage" in the wake of Miller? Would the first jet be the beginning thread, or would it be the later text product that is to be considered for analysis? Miller again, a propos of a narrative episode, provides his personal solution in what he calls "touchstones:"

I thought of Melanie, whom normally, were I planning a book of my life, I would never have bothered to include. How had she managed to inject herself when ordinarily I scarcely gave her a thought?... Two *touchstones* fell immediately into my lap. Melanie? Why yes, remember always 'beauty' and 'insanity'. And why should I remember beauty and insanity? Then there came to mind these words: 'varieties of flesh'. (Secus, 227)¹

An image is introduced, as if by mistake, into the writing of the text. But upon close examination it is found to derive, ultimately, from a wider semantic field that gave it birth by association, either on the vertical axis, as in metaphor, in a paradigmatic relationship built *in absentia*, or on the horizontal axis, as in metonymy, in a syntagmatic relationship built on contiguity of sound or shape, *in praesentia*. The two touchstones mentioned above, "beauty" and "insanity" are joined to a third one, "varieties of flesh," and trigger the image "Melanie." The "intruding" word, carrying with it other semantic features and intertexts, is a product not of the writer, but of the associative powers of the language. True, "Melanie" as a character or an idea in the Millerian text is attached to its creator by mnemonic and experiential bonds that are peculiar to Miller-the-author, but, nonetheless, "Melanie" is apprehended by the reader as a product of the text itself with a narrational and characterial connection to the other text-produced character, Miller-the-narrator. It is in this context that we have to deal with "touchstones:" exhibiting all the external characteristics of thematic and semantic units, they nevertheless are the possession of the text itself which "chooses"—if I may use this obviously problematic expression—with more or less stylistic success to transfer them to the reader.

Along with the concept of macro/micro-ground that I applied to surrealism, and with the Millerian "touchstone" term, I would like to

present a third, more pertinent approach, one based on Riffaterre's notions of the matrix, the hypogram, and the model, which will give me a more stylistically appropriate tool to deal with the semantic aspects of the excessive images in the Millerian text.

An additional reason has prompted me to adopt the notion of matrices. According to the Webster's, "matrix" means, among other things, "the womb," and that "which gives origin or form to a thing, or which serves to enclose it." Needless to say, "matrix," etymologically, comes from the Latin "mother." These considerations, interestingly, branch out in a double-patterned aspect again: linguistically speaking, the matrix is the originator of images of markedness; thematically, the matrix is the Great Mother, the Womb, the eternal feminine with whom Miller and his text struggle throughout. The womb, as I will show shortly, is everywhere at work as a matrix, and, conversely, Miller's matrices are always in the process of creating and generating signification.

The Riffaterrian approach is, however, more straightforward and, unfortunately, less complex: it proposes "a coherent and relatively simple description of the structure of meaning in a poem" (Riffaterre, 1980, 1)². The important word here is *structure* in its unusual association with the volatile concept of meaning: meaning is structured just as any other element in the text and its generation follows specific principles and rules. The actual structure is not a volatile feature, however, and only those facts that are more or less easily recognised by the reader (2) (the architect/lectrice) will be described, analysed, and classified.

An important element in this approach is the way mimesis, or representation, is dealt with or, to be more specific in the Millerian context, the way mimesis is *mistreated*. Riffaterre speaks of "semantic indirection" and of its resulting displacement in metaphor and metonymy; distortion in ambiguity, contradiction, and nonsense; and the creation of meaning in symmetry, rhyme, and semantic equivalencies (2). The common denominator with all three resultants is the *threatening* of mimesis or what is called ungrammaticality (2). Meaning is associated with mimesis and significance is associated with semiosis: "Everything related to this integration of signs from the mimesis level into the higher level of significance is a manifestation of *semiosis*" (4). To be more specific, a literary text undergoes a shift in its semiotic makeup while moving from the level of representation—mimesis—to a higher level where the inherent complexity of the outside reality is replaced by another system of signification.

This does not preclude or in any way invalidate what was said earlier about the dissemination of the text. Semiosis works on the level of the text

and its significance is what enables the *reader* to disseminate the text. In fact, the reader is never absent from a semiotic approach to deviation: in a first reading of the marked passage, it is the meaning which is apprehended, and the reader is working with the assumption that the language used is referential and mimetic. A second "retroactive" reading, occurring almost at the same time, takes place and modifies the text according not to meaning—the first reading—but to significance (Riffaterre, 1980, 5).

An example will clarify the distinction: if we take the "garden" passage quoted in the preceding chapter, we will agree that the first reading was purely mimetic: the impression was that Miller was describing the entrance to a building and enumerating the names of flowers and plants, etc. However, a second reading revealed that, behind the external facade of incongruously mystifying plant names, behind the list and catalogue, lay another structure, very tightly knit, revolving around paronomastic associations. This does not mean that the first reading is carried on in linguistic ignorance *per se*, and that the second attempt requires an absolute dictionary knowledge. Rather, both readings are valuable yet offer different interpretative paths. Semiosis governs the structuring of such features and devices found in the text: the original complexity of the first reading is replaced by another structure, more unified, revolving around a purely textual device, yet no less deviant than the first. It is not the deviation process that is tamed, nor the expansive quality of the lexicon, but the approach to representation itself.

An interesting service rendered by mimesis is that the first reading carries in itself the key to the semiotic higher level: any obstacle which threatens meaning in the first reading alerts the reader to the existence of semiosis and to significance (Riffaterre, 1980, 6). To use our example again, had the names used for the plants and flowers been in common use, the reader would not have made the necessary shift. But since the passage is loaded with phonetically-unpronounceable lexical items acting as obstacles in the way of the reader, a second reading, more attentive, slower, is mandatory. It is during this second reading that significance is apprehended. To go back to our double-pattern and marked/unmarked analogy, marked passages force the reader to attempt a retroactive reading that will "exfoliate" and disseminate into a stylistically-rich field of significance. Markedness is equated with semiosis and with the ensuing explosion of signifiers experienced by the reader. *The double pattern thus works not only within two distinct passages as Bradford had originally thought, but also within the same passage which acts as containing both a mimetic first meaning and a semiotic second significance.*

The potentials of Riffaterre's theory reside in that markedness and unmarkedness not only act in a deviatory relationship between a passage and another one in the same text (what I called the endo-text deviation) but again *within* the same passage: the markedness of the "garden" passage is in fact the result of a complex process: it is first unmarked, since it is apparently a benign description, then the obstacles created by the phonetic and lexical items "mark" it as potentially deviant, and finally the second reading, on the semiotic level where the underlying structure is revealed, "confirms" the marked status of the passage. This process is sometimes so quick that it creates the impression of being a clearly-defined, one-status-only textual feature.

As is now obvious, the reader is of paramount importance in the unfolding of significance: it is he/she who first encounters the text/passage and wills a second reading that reveals a structure. The greater the *distance* between the complex mimesis and the simple semiosis, the greater the impression of conflict (Riffaterre, 1980, 13) and, consequently, the greater the surprise experienced by the reader and the ensuing Barthean pleasure. Riffaterre gives the term *matrix* to the underlying semiotic code which can be translated into a "literal" sentence, and *model* to the first actualisation of the matrix in the text:

The poem results from the transformation of the *matrix*, a minimal and literal sentence, into a longer, complex, and nonliteral periphrasis. The matrix is hypothetical, being only the grammatical and lexical actualization of a structure. The matrix may be epitomized in one word, in which case the word will not appear in the text. It is always actualized in successive variants; the form of these variants is governed by the first or primary actualization, the *model*. Matrix, model, and text are variants of the same structure. (19)

Going back to our "garden" passage, it is obvious that the matrix could be "jabber" or "jabbering" or "the powers of jabber," etc. It is not present in the passage but is actualised in the successive variants, the primary model of which is probably "bosky" or "whiffletrees," depending on the reader's background and expectations.

Let us go further. Riffaterre adds that if the matrix is hypothetical, usually invisible in the text, and minimal, and since the model is just the first item in the actualisation, a "presupposed" or semantic structure, logically bound to the matrix, carries the model along its further manifestations in the text. Such presupposed or semantic structure Riffaterre calls the "hypogram" (Riffaterre, 1980, 168). The matrix's nuclear word must be actualised by words, obviously, and these words must follow a

hypogrammatic structure in order to be sustained from the first "jet," the model, to its end. Hypograms can be *sememes*, *presuppositions*, *clichés*, and *descriptive systems* (25). If the matrix is actualised by a series of semantically related words that belong to the same "family," then the hypogram would be a semic/presuppositional one (a matrix *music* would engender "piano," "musician," "opera," "singing," "celebration," etc.) and would function "like an encyclopedia of representations related to the meaning of that word" (26). If the matrix is actualised by a series of words that form, initially, a cliché, first actualised in the reader's mind by association, then the hypogram would be of the cliché type. Descriptive hypograms are very much related to the dictionary definition of their kernel words but more complex than the presupposition ones, and are thus more wide-ranging than other hypograms (39).

Another important kind of hypogram, however, has been overlooked by Riffaterre: in the "garden" example, the matrix "jabber" is actualised in its first word "whiffletrees" and kept going by what I call a *figurative* hypogram, i.e., a kernel device that produces the other words in the hypogrammatic list; in this example, the hypogram would be "paronomastic association." Once the reader grasps the hypogram, the matrix is clear, and vice-versa: if the matrix is first found, the hypogram is more easily followed. If "jabber" is first posited from some indication in the text, the paronomastic chain is put in the context of "jabbering for the sake of producing sounds as in paronomasia." If the paronomastic sequence is first remarked, the underlying matrix "paronomasia is an instance of jabbering" is perceived. Figurative hypograms are crucial in that they do involve the text in a more efficient manner in the production of its own deviation, or markedness.

With this in mind, I would like to proceed with the analysis of the various excess-producing matrices in the Millerian text, pointing to their variant hypograms and their verbal actualisations in the form of models. In each case one or more passages will be presented and the matrix will be exemplified in its different/variant hypograms and models, if judged necessary. The matrices can be taken in isolation and studied as different discursive tactics in the text. I have arranged them, however, according to a progression in the imagery that follows the narrator's avowed path, at least in the texts I have chosen to explore which show the workings of the Millerian style, from darkness to light, *a process, quite interestingly, paralleled by the reader's own stylistic enlightenment and education in unpredictability*. The following matrices will be dealt with:

- Separation and Fragmentation
- Oceanic Depths
- Chrono Undergrounds
- Scatology
- The City
- Woman
- Art and the Artist
- Chance
- The Hub and the Centre
- Flow, Fusion, and Wholeness

Separation and Fragmentation

Jane Nelson's study, mentioned earlier, applies Jungian principles to the image structure in the works of Miller. I will concern myself exclusively with those elements in her work which bear a direct relevance to a stylistics of the Millerian text. To Nelson, almost the entirety of the Millerian discourse revolves around a psychological struggle between the "I" and the unconscious:

The struggle of the *I* in *Capricorn* to separate itself from the deadly fascination of the unconscious and achieve independence is dramatized in relationships between symbols rather than in a narrative structure. These symbolic actions and the larger pattern of conversion into opposites, which Jung called *enantiodromia*, are compulsive 'actions'... (Nelson, 1970, 99–100)

Miller's imagery, according to Nelson, is the depiction of the *enantiodromia* process, where the narrator desperately tries to break free from the power of the unconscious and recover his individual identity. Thus, images of separation, fragmentation, darkness, and loss accompany the quester in the first stages of his inner battle. Interestingly, these images, as Nelson points out in the quotation above, are set in symbols rather than in a narrative structure. It is true that when the *moment* erupts, it does so as a stoppage in the flow of the narrative, as already explained, but the narrative structure is essential as an overall matrix which allows the image to be expressed.

The loss of unity, triggered by what the psychoanalyst Otto Rank—whose ideas are seen by some as having been influential in the shaping of Miller-the-writer's ideas—calls the "birth trauma" (Martin, 1991, 55), induces a sense of fragmentation also noticed by Linda Lehrer (Lehrer, 1975, 58). Crossen took up the Nelson thread and added to it:

Henry Miller's autobiographical novels are constructed as a retelling of his life as myth. They are vehicles for his self-healing as a man, retaining the implicit premise that the only way to heal the divisions in oneself is by re-making the self mythically, through a symbolic traversing of the past... [Miller] wants to cure himself of the early experience of separation: both from a short period of happiness as a child, and from the love his mother would not give him. (Crossen, 1978, Abstract, n/p)

To retell life as a myth, as that of the "I" trying to extract itself from the mire of the primeval unconscious, Miller has to re-enact, like a patient under psychoanalysis, the steps that led to what he thinks is liberation. The agonising separation, after the bliss of non-existence, or of life in the womb, has to be retold in painful details. The period of childhood is also seen, in relation to adulthood, as a state of unity followed by the fragmentation of life as it fills up with worries and responsibilities. A recurrent image in this context is that of life in the old neighbourhood, before the family moved to another place in Brooklyn. The self, therefore, undergoes periods of relapse and is almost never, in Miller's works, wholly free from fragmentation. A seminal rule of stylistic analysis is that the idea expressed, the sememe, is actualised in its phonetic or graphemic representation; the matrix is made visible, through the hypogram(s), in the models:

The plasm of the dream is the pain of separation... We walk the streets with a thousand legs and eyes, with furry antennae picking up the slightest clue and memory of the past. In the aimless to and fro we pause now and then, like long, sticky plants, and we swallow whole the live morsels of the past... a voice is nailed against the door and long creepy things with furry antennae and thousand legs drop from the pipes like beads of sweat... grief-spit drooling down into the cold, waxen flesh, searing the dead eyes, the hard, chipped lids of dead clams. (*Black Spring*, 12–13)

The hypogram in this passage is a semic one, and is triggered by the first word, the model, "plasm," which takes on two meanings: it can be the plasma, the liquid part of the blood, or it can be the suffix morpheme with the meaning "form." Thus the opening model would either introduce a liquid that has been *separated* from its main function, or a form, and the sentence would mean that the form of dreams is the pain of separation. As happens often with the Millerian text, it may well be that the ambiguity is not gratuitous and that what is meant is both the *plasma* and the *-plasm* of dreams.

My analysis shows that indeed the form of dreams is the frantic scurrying of the self in search of a semblance of unity, and, in addition, that the fragmentation is the result of a plasmatic separation, a concept enhanced

by features denoting liquids and wetness ("plasm," "sticky," "beads of sweat," "drooling," "clams"). Separation is associated with death and disease. The main protagonist who is experiencing this separation is the pronoun "we" which appears in the first half of the passage, then it is transformed into an impersonal entity half-way through, and finally the separation is so complete that there is nobody left to experience anything. The self is not in the picture anymore, and the text registers coffins and death only. Another transformation is that of the "we," or the collective "I," to an entity with a thousand legs and eyes, with furry antennae touching and sensing everything around it in search of a link. The separation has already taken place in the shape of the thousand information-gathering sensors which do not bring, however, any unifying message. Even this creature cannot survive long enough: later in the passage a dissociation from a first-person plural pronoun to a third-person plural one signals the inevitable dichotomy. What is more, the *not-us-anymore* creatures drop from the pipes "like beads of sweat:" the already ephemeral foothold on the past vanishes and the hapless furry "thing" falls to its doom.

Figuratively speaking, paradoxes and oxymorons abound, adding to the already confused impression a sense of the impossibility of reconciliation, or of fusion again. The only semblance of union, stylistically present in the form of synesthesia, the "voice is nailed against the door" image, is ultimately doomed as the others in the text, since it is nailed shut and has no chance to enter the discourse ever again. The last sentence is a symmetrical construction that produces effects of unavoidable death and the separation and mutilation of body parts: the cold and waxen flesh, the seared dead eyes, and the hard chipped lids (eyes) of dead clams (eyes).

Chaos as a semantic unit often accompanies matrices of separation and fragmentation in the Millerian text. Seen as the original state of things, it stands nonetheless for the death or non-existence of the self. William Gordon says about *Tropic of Capricorn* that it "had to be concerned with a primeval world, a world before form, before birth. The chaos of this book is the chaos of pure nonbeing" (Gordon, 1968, 111). The water or liquid imagery seen in the above passage also alludes, semantically, to the primeval biological world. Gordon says again about *Tropic of Capricorn*:

[It] is the story of rebellion against the universe of death and the beginnings of the descent into chaos. A part of this descent is conceived as a purely negative process of emptying oneself, or descending to the purely biological level of life, affirming that level first. (121)

On the purely biological level, only creatures with a thousand legs and furry antennae can survive precariously.

Decker remarks, in connection with chaos, that Miller's writing, compared to that of the surrealists and the Beats, is everything but "automatic:"

The simulacra of chaos rather than chaos itself, Miller's narratives do not fall under the rubric of "automatic" writing like those of Jack Kerouac, nor can one assert that Miller's work offers an analogue to the "cut and paste" novels of such authors as William Burroughs and B. S. Johnson. (Decker, 1996, 9)

It is evident that Miller was not writing passages similar to the one I quoted "under dictation," even if the first impression, created obviously by the hypogrammatic series of the matrix, is one of haphazard combinations. In fact, it is a measure of the matrix's success in defining itself: the more adequate the hypogram used to fulfil the matrix of separation and fragmentation, the more fragmented the effect, and the more surrealist-like the discourse. However, the surrealist effect created here is only illusory: the juxtaposition of the images, though slightly similar as an end-result, stems from fundamentally different textual techniques.

Gordon mentions that the negative aspect of the descent was only part of the process. Indeed, Miller-the-narrator, despite his unending discourse about the pain and suffering experienced by fragmentation, maintains at times a more than stoic stance towards complete and undifferentiated dissolution. He has learned to "dance," and in fact he has mastered two kinds of dances, the "gorilla" kind, and the "skeleton" one:

[O]n this fringe of the virginal logic of perfection I am dancing the soul dance of white desperation, the last white man pulling the trigger on the last emotion, the gorilla of despair beating his breast with immaculate gloved paws. I am the gorilla who feels his wings growing, a giddy gorilla in the centre of a satin-like emptiness; the night too grows like an electrical plant, shooting white-hot buds into velvet black space. (*Capricorn*, 110)

This is an interesting passage, stylistically speaking. The separation matrix is actualised through the hypogram "white vs. black." I would call this passage a "variation in white and black." Indeed, most of the lexical items which follow revolve around one of the two colours. The "white" or "whitish" ones are: virginal, white desperation, white man, immaculate, satin-like, white-hot buds. The "black" ones are: gorilla, emptiness, night, velvet, black space. White is pitted against black in all its variations and the semic code is clear: black and white are one and the same (the narrator is both a white

man and a black gorilla, etc.) but separation has created divisions and terms of confusion.

The "skeleton" dance transforms the performer into an even more "impervious" sufferer:

Best of all was the skeleton dance. I would first wash all my parts at the sink, change my linen, shave, powder, comb my hair, don my dancing pumps...I began to prance and neigh. I bought frogs and mated them with toads. I thought of the easiest thing to do, which is to die, but I did nothing. I stood still and began to petrify at the extremities³. (180-81)

Again, the matrix of separation is brought about by a semic opposition hypogram, this time between deciduousness and immutability, as can be seen from the model, the preparation for the dance. Although change of form is a characteristic of the dreaded fragmentation, and immutability gives the impression of unity and fusion, the narrator opts for the first, the shedding of skins: the words/terms that connote change are: the dance itself, washing (shedding away), the change of linen, shaving, mating. The words/terms put in opposition are: the skeleton, dying, standing still, being petrified. Notice also the sheer occurrence of the personal pronoun "I." Another feature is the more relaxed rhythm of the sentences, as in the gorilla dance, compared to the very first passage where the sentences were short, fast, and created a sense of urgency. The choice to accept separation has been made, although the duality is still very much present and unavoidable.

Fragmentation, however, is but the initial stage where the Millerian discourse prepares itself to undergo the many *stylistic* vicissitudes that awaits it. The first movement in the text and the first matrix after the initial stage is the going down to the primeval oceanic depths.

Oceanic Depths

Jane Nelson, again, speaks about the two sides of the journey back to hell and to the primeval organic world:

The dark route inward leads either to transformation or annihilation; hence Miller's insistence on danger in his fiction...The night journeys, the descent into Hell, the returns to the womb, to the sea, to the night, to the primal stuff, are all symbols of the movement into the inner world, the unconscious from which the *I* must emerge transformed, if it survives the numinous fascination of the

unconscious and is not devoured, dissolved, or spiritually castrated. (Nelson, 1970, 124-125)

As in the preceding matrix, "oceanic depths" provides the Millerian text with a useful stylistic tool with which to explore the resources of the language in the multifaceted variations on models:

Off like a streak. Down, down, to the cosmocentric cesspool. Leviathans swimming around in strangely sunlit depths...A rich, fecundating dream, shot through with a mystic blue light. I had sunk to that dangerous level where, out of sheer bliss and wonder, one lapses back to the button mold. In some vague dreamy way I was aware that I must make a herculean effort. The struggle to reach the surface was agonising, exquisitely agonising. Now and then I succeeded in opening my eyes: I saw the room, as through a mist, but my body was down below in the shimmering marine depths. To swoon back was voluptuous. I fell clear through to the bottomless bottom, where I waited like a shark. Then slowly, very slowly, I rose. It was tantalising. All cork and no fins. Nearing the surface I was sucked under again, pulled down, down, in delicious helplessness, sucked into the empty vortex, there to wait through endless passages of time for the will to gather and raise me like a sunken buoy. (*Clutchy*, 79-80)

Danger and pleasure underscore the textual experience of markedness in a hypogram of semic opposition: cesspool/rich, fecundating; sunlit/depths; dangerous/bliss and wonder; agonising/exquisitely; bottomless/bottom; shark/no fins; helplessness/delicious; endless/passages of time; sunken/buoy. The return to the bottom is accompanied by conflicting emotions: the "I" must find itself in the primeval mud yet it must also surrender in order to, paradoxically, come to grips with the original state.

The reader in turn experiences the confusion of the two sides of the process of going down in terms of textual oxymorons⁴. At the same time the repository of the dark and light forces, the unconscious serves as the ground from which the *I* will emerge. Out of dung and cesspool come life and fecundation. *Similarly, out of the devatory nature of the text, a structural unity is reached.* The double pattern is clear in that the two sides of the text, markedness and unmarkedness, vie for survival and ultimately reach a state of cohabitation.

A sub-matrix to oceanic depths is that of the whale, symbol of the power to go down to the bottom of the ocean and go up for air, a mammal that gravitates between the two worlds. Associated with the whale is the ability, in folklore, from Jonah to Pinocchio to the Baron Munchhausen, for the large sea mammal to provide safe shelter—and sometimes housing!—for souls in need of rejuvenation. Similarly, Miller-the-narrator, in order to pursue his investigations into the nature of the self, uses the same vehicle,

and hangs upside down, alone in the body of the whale, his eyes red with blood and his hair "white as worms," alone in the body of the whale like a "fetus under a dead sun" (*Black Spring*, 198).

Gordon accurately comments that to descend "into the belly of the whale is to descend into death, but 'by voluntarily going down into death', we suddenly find illumination" (Gordon, 1968, 202). The Millerian discourse gives the reader both the stars and the darkness of the pit, both sides of the same coin; it *doubles the pattern* again. The bottom of the depths is also the source of authorship, the well of "inspiration," and a descent to the hell of inchoate being is salutary for the process of creation. Here the matrix comes very close to one of the fundamental principles of surrealism, viz., that the "inner man" is to be found in the stillness of the unconscious, a stillness hardly rippled by the thinking and reasoning mind. Going down to the bottom, "face to face with the source, with authorship itself," it is "a boon to sink to the very bottom of one's being and never stir again" (*Nexus*, 76). Miller, down at the source, undergoes a profound alteration in vision and feels like "some monster of the deep" (76).

Yet—and here again we notice the crucial, paramount difference between the surrealist and Millerian texts—the descent in the belly of the whale is *always* followed by a return to the surface to *take in fresh air*, i.e., to return to unmarkedness, to the Apollonian paean after the dithyramb. The Millerian whale is not the "soluble fish" of the surrealists, doomed to spend all its life in the depths of the oceans. The resurfacing, however, is sharp indeed. The following is the "coming to" of the above passage with the already-mentioned focalising device:

As if a mist were suddenly blown away by a strong wind, I came to with both feet and with this absolutely irrelevant thought uppermost in my mind—that Christmas was on us. (76)

The monster of the deep vanishes by resurfacing and reality is restored until the next descent. Saturation, again, is skilfully avoided. One interesting characteristic of the whale vehicle is that it is not only warm and safe, it is also *transparent* in order to allow the "swallowed" a view of the different worlds they are moving through. Like a spectator, the swallowed enjoys a superlative advantage of vision that compensates for the horrors experienced at the very bottom:

His [Carl's] ability to remain under water, so to speak, was extraordinary. When he emerged, and began narrating⁵ his underwater experiences, it was like a revelation. It proved, for one thing, that he had been very much alive all the while.

And not only alive, but extremely observant. As if he had swum about like a fish in a bowl, as if he had seen everything through a magnifying glass. (*Clichy*, 32–33)

The concept of seeing through the glass and, consequently, of not being able to interact with the object(s) seen has raised a storm of criticism around Miller, most of it unjustified when the glass device is seen as it really is, viz., a discursive device to bring forth the matrix to the level of the text. George Orwell's memorable article, "Inside the Whale," was the first of a series of more or less veiled references to the "passivity" of Henry Miller who, "Short of being dead...[has reached] the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility...He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting*" (Orwell, 1953, 18). This irresponsibility Orwell mitigates by giving it a special stamp: "It is a species of quietism, implying either complete unbelief or else a degree of belief amounting to mysticism" (18). The double pattern emerges again, clear for all to see: the Millerian text is neither about "complete unbelief" only nor about "a belief amounting to mysticism;" these terms simply express the effect of the Millerian prose on the reader and the confusion created by the overlapping of markedness and unmarkedness⁶.

However, Orwell's mellow reprobation of Miller's passivity was countered, as mentioned in the introduction, by Salman Rushdie's 1984 article "Outside the Whale" where the latter dismisses the American writer as just a "happy pornographer" (Rushdie, 1984, 95–96) and scorns Orwell's gentle stance. To Rushdie, the artist's home should be *outside* the whale, where political and social action bear fruit and help in changing society (Holdefer, 1993, 73). We will not enter into the details of the polemic, and will leave it to biographers and to literary historians⁷.

It is true that Miller-the-narrator basks in a peculiar kind of Whitmanesque passivity or, better to say, in a peculiar kind of apoliticality that interestingly fits into the overall scheme of this study. Dionysus was the "least political" god of the Greeks (Jeanmaire, 1978, 8), and left the burden of legislation and pronouncement to his nemesis Apollo. Markedness, in its shuffling of the bonds between signifier and signified, cannot but produce an effect of anarchy which is not, *at first sight*, conducive to political commitments. The easy *laissez-faire* of Dionysus—in his more jovial moods, that is—prompts Miller to say: "Harmony, serenity, bliss do not come from struggle but from surrender" (*Stand Still*, 25). In *Black Spring*, Miller goes even further and states that he exposes himself, in the streets, to the destructive, disintegrating elements which surround him, yet at the same time retaining his sanity by allowing everything wreak havoc on him. Obeying, rather than commanding, is the secret key to survival (*Black Spring*,

28). The whale-that-just-sees is indeed Dionysus who is torn apart, eaten, and regenerated in a similar process of going down to hell, witnessing all, and coming up almost unscathed. The stylistic explanation of the myth is clear: the text is the whale which goes from the clear waters of unmarkedness to the murky depths of markedness. Inside the sea mammal the reader witnesses the fluctuations of the Millerian discourse.

Seeing, however, is not condoning, and Miller makes use of his eye-in-the-whale discursive device to record the evils of society in this strongly marked passage:

Life going on as usual everywhere. Breakfast at ten sharp. An armless, legless man bending bar with his teeth. Dynamic falling through from the stratosphere. Garters descending in long graceful spirals. A woman with a gashed torso struggling desperately to screw her severed head on...Atop an umbrella fern lies a fresh corpse full of bullet holes. An iron cross is suspended from its neck. Somebody's asking for a sandwich. The water is too agitated for sandwiches. Look under S in the dictionary! (*Choby*, 79)

Fresh from his dive into the oceanic depths, the voyager inside the whale sees with new eyes that life still goes on, that murder and mayhem and the insane pursuit of money are the *modus vivendi* of mankind on the surface. While people die, others are frenetically trying to live, disregarding what is happening around them. Miller, in the words of Orwell, may well be a Nero, but at least he was "fiddling with his face towards the flame" (Orwell, 1953, 17). In line with Orwell's analogy, the Millerian text prophesies the impending doom of civilisation outside the oceanic depths, and it is the function of that text, or what Miller calls "the Book," to record the event. When everything will have gone, the waters, like in Genesis, will recede, and mankind, once again, will populate the earth, a symbol of the seeker's rejuvenation through water.

The "Book," i.e., the Millerian text, by setting the world of the "norm"—unmarkedness—on fire, by producing a more-than-surrealist "spark" that will explode the text in an enormous conflagration of markedness, will have restored the "world" to its original purity. However, the passage to the drying surface will have first to go through the chthonic undergrounds matrix.

Chthonic Undergrounds

According to Jeanmaire, the young god Dionysus was associated with death, with underground deities, and thus primarily with Hades. The noisy and tumultuous processions that symbolised Dionysus and his followers were equated with the passage of a ghostly army (Jeanmaire, 1978, 270). Indeed, the Dionysus myth as told earlier in this study tells of the going of the god to the realm of the dead and emerging later on triumphantly. The underground matrix is evident in the Millerian passages where the hero is telling of his sojourn among the dead. Stylistically, with each "plunge" into markedness, the structural "miracle" of the double-patterned Millerian text is more evident. Miller is fascinated by the fact that something so dead and buried as he was could be resuscitated so many times, and each time accompanied by an even deeper plunge into the void, making the resuscitation an even greater miracle (*Capricorn*, 209).

Mathieu, in his study of the Orphic elements in the works of Miller, describes a similar resurrection process, the two stages of which are called *katabasis*, the "descent into Hades" and *palingenesis*, the "joy of re-birth" (Mathieu, 1976b, 36). The katabatic stage is accessed, however, by an act of will: the writer has first to delve into chaos, a process slightly similar to the surrealists' self-surrender to the darkness of the inner world. In *Black Spring*, Miller undergoes a Lautréamont-like downward initiation where, walking to the dead end of a street, he jumps into the precipice dividing the living from the dead (*Black Spring*, 193–94). Miller-the-narrator tells of his Dionysian passion and of his stay in the realm of the dead:

My scalp is cut away, the gray meat hangs over my ears in shreds, my feet are burned away, my sides pierced with arrows. In a pen against a broken fence I lie with my bowels beside me; all mangled and gory the beautiful white temple that was stretched with skin and muscle...My body is a sepulcher which the ghouls are rifling. (177)

After the ritual sparagmos, the worms partake of the omophagia and the hero is left to his "night-life," his "black spring," as the title of the book suggests. *Katabasis* takes the initiate into a barren world where things have lost their identity. The tomb-like existence led is thus one of void and nothingness and is compared to the life in a stone forest, the centre of which is chaos. Until the writer encounters a force strong enough to snatch him out of this stone forest, life is impossible and not a word, not a sentence, not a page will be written which will have a shred of meaning (*Capricorn*, 63). Indeed, the stone forest seems to be the counterpart of the

vegetal life which brings nourishment and oxygen. It is the prison where the writer is caught, yet the centre of that forest is chaos, the very heart of it, and one is perplexed as to the semantic feature associating centre and chaos. That there is movement in this dead centre is clear: someone is to whirl the writer out of the centripetal power that keeps him chained to the dead eye of the cyclone. We are here reminded of the Bakhtin centripetal/centrifugal duality and of heteroglossia: the tomb and the chthonic underworld, albeit powers to be reckoned with, are not sufficient to produce the spark that will liberate the text from the clutches of self-reflexivity. The stone forest has to be passed through and experienced, but the text's ultimate function is to disseminate itself. Then the "pages" to be written will have meaning and the writer and reader alike may then stand in a new forest, that of the text⁸, and wonder with Ezra Pound:

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,
Knowing the truth of things unseen before
(Pound, 1957, 6)

In *The Colossus of Maroussi*, Miller-the-narrator is faced with the chthonic characteristics of Greece and apprehends the immensity of the death experience. The similarities with the Dionysian myth are surprising: Zeus, twice the father of Dionysus, is seen as nurturing the soul of the initiate and at the same time preparing it for the ensuing sparagmos and omophagia:

I fell into a nightmare. I was being gently and endlessly rocked by the omnipotent Zeus in a burning cradle. I was toasted to a crisp and then gently dumped into a sea of blood. I swam ceaselessly amidst dismembered bodies marked with the cross and the crescent. I came at last to a rock-ribbed shore. It was bare and absolutely deserted of man. I wandered to a cave in the side of a mountain.
(*Colossus*, 159)

The above passage can easily be elucidated from a stylistic viewpoint and read like an allegory: the swimming among the dismembered bodies marked with cross and crescent is the reader's and the text's attachment to the different signifiers and their corresponding signifieds. They have all been dismembered, i.e., the semiotic connection has been severed and they just swim in freedom in the text. The reaching of a rock-ribbed shore "bare and absolutely deserted of man" is the text's reliance on itself, the authorless shore where signifier and signified cease to interfere with the survival of the discourse.

The writer has to go beneath the surface of things, beneath the conventional sign system of the language; mimesis, the world of reality, has

to be renounced for a while in order for semiosis, the world of significance divorced from the signifier-signified struggle of meaning, to be revealed. One has to be crushed, to be "carbonized," to be utterly wiped out as a human being in order to be born again an individual (*Capricorn*, 33). In the realm of semiosis things are seen in reverse: it is unmarkedness that appears marked, and the first reading appears discordant in a seemingly contradictory juxtaposition between the real and the unreal (9).

With this metamorphosis, with the end of the first initiation—for the Millerian text undergoes many initiations and setbacks,—the death stage is seen under a new light and a Bataillean palingénésis linked to excess is about to occur in the metaphor of a cemetery bursting with food, and the whole street living off that provender. The excess goes off, as it were, in a steam of song, dance, depravity, and debauchery (*Black Spring*, 174–75). The initial dismemberment, the sparagmos, the katabasis, the disruption of the language, or language going underground, its markedness, all have been swallowed by the text and fertilised for—and by—the reader to enjoy in a bout of Dionysiac frenzy. The Maenadic celebration of eating the dead, the omophagia, the palingénésis, the restoration of the language, or unmarkedness regained, all are for the reader to experience. *The reader is a Maenad in the Millerian text.*

The palingénésis of the narrator bestows on him dominion over the chthonic realms and confers a corresponding solidity and anchorage not easily shaken, for it has as its roots the earth itself. The narrator has become a mountain goat—incidentally, one of the sacrificial animals of Dionysus (Jeanmaire, 1978, 10)—a *Capricorn* who, standing alone on the top of the mountain, does not ask how he got to the summit, keeping his muzzle to the ground, quietly grazing (*Capricorn*, 185).

After the chthonic experience, the narrator is free to visit the underworld again in order to seek markedness whenever the need arises, and to seek the now tamed semiotic void which is "unthinkable" to those who do not possess the key. Miller has just made his first step towards earning his reputation as the "happy rock," another matrix that will be dealt with later on in this study. But before that stage is reached, however, the quester is to experience again and again, in unison with the fluctuations of a double-patterning process which is now more easily perceived, descents into death-like realms.

Scatology

Indeed, the sojourn in the land of death brings with it, inevitably, images of disease, rot, and putrefaction. In a vein similar to Lautréamont's "I am dirty. The lice gnaw at me" passage cited in Part 1, Miller opens up *Tropic of Cancer* with the telltale observation that, living at the "Villa Borghese," where everything is spotlessly clean and almost clinically ordered, he and Boris, who discovered he was lousy, are all alone and dead. Miller had to shave Boris' armpits and even then the itching continued. How could one get lousy in a place such as the Villa Borghese (*Cancer*, 9)?

The narrator knows about lice because they have accompanied him in his *katábasis* and the memory still lingers. Yet the lice that crawl are not physical, and have no external justification, for it is the lice that come from inside, from rotten bodies and minds. Is this matrix a gratuitous display of disgusting images? Norman Mailer praises Miller for keeping his *muen* amidst the dirt:

Miller bounces in the stink. We read Tropic of Cancer, that book of horrors, and feel happy. It is because there is honor in the horror, and metaphor in the hideous. How, we cannot even begin to say... Look, he was forever saying, you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, fuck it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if we can stand the smell. (Mailer, 1976, 16-17)

Erica Jong equates Miller's frequent use of the word "shit" with a cathartic process which aims at transcending the sordidness of life: "[T]he words became clean in his mouth. He purified the excrement of life and made it roses" (Jong, 1981, 387)⁹. Miller equates the lice-experience with that of writing: all the great authors have gone through their *katábasis* and *palingénesis* in a Bloom-like lice procession from predecessor to esthete. Miller frankly associates himself with Cervantes, Dostoyevski, Rabelais, and Amadeus Mozart in the *passion* of genius and in the new name he bestows upon himself: "Miguel Feodor François Wolfgang Valentine Miller" (*Black Spring*, 40). This "obsession" with death and its more nauseating sides finds a parallel in the works of Bataille where excrement, death and eroticism are on the other side of a strong barrier to be broken during periods of *expenditure*, as Alastair Brotchie explains: "Excrement, death and eroticism are...intimately connected and fenced in by prohibitions which are, however, intended to be transgressed during celebrations of heterology such as festivals and sacrifice" (Bataille, 1995, 24). The connection is clear: filth is associated with the *katabatic* Dionysus, with the excess of energy released by the masses in moments of gratuitous expenditure, and with

markedness. The release is effected through a text that not only deviates from the norm(s) but which also attacks the primary taboos of society: excrement, death, and sex, turning so strong a light over them as to almost eradicate all sense of measure and stretch the signifier-signified bond to the breaking point.

This light turned on what Bataille called the "heterogeneous matter"—the most repulsive sort—had for its aim the destruction of man's false sense of dignity. The "heterogeneous matter" theory was anathema to Breton who condemned Bataille as an "excremental philosopher," not simply because of the subject matter, which was dealt with by later surrealists, but because of a fundamental defect in approach: to Breton, Bataille was guilty of mixing the heterogeneous with the *rational*, i.e., his theory was thought out, and did not come directly from the "inner" source:

M. Bataille's misfortune is to reason: admittedly, he reasons like someone who "has a fly on his nose", which allies him more closely with the dead than with the living, but *he does reason*. He is trying, with the help of the tiny mechanism in him which is not completely out of order, to share his obsessions: this very fact proves that he cannot claim, no matter what he may say, to be opposed to any system, like an unthinking brute. (quoted in Bataille, 1993, xi)

The same words could have been directed to Miller who exhibited his own version of the excremental in a memorable episode in *Tropic of Cancer* where he takes an Indian disciple of Ghandi to a brothel. The holy side connected to the Indian's spiritual mission in Paris is pitted against the obscenity of the event. There, to the dismay of the prostitutes, the faithful disciple discharges his bowels in the *bidet* which becomes the centre of attention: two enormous "turds" are floating in the water (*Cancer*, 98).

The turds episode has generated a lot of speculation: John Parkin asserts that they symbolise the empty aspirations of mankind (Parkin, 1990, 126) and that man, however belated, is after all a creature of the flesh in the fulfilment of natural needs. In addition, the turds floating in the *bidet* represent the extent to which filth can eradicate the most noble of aspirations by bringing back mankind to its primeval situation, revealing the transient mask of civilisation to be a sham. Bataille comes close to this view in his "The Sacrifice of the Gibbon" scene in "The Pineal Eye:" a female gibbon is captured and buried alive in the sand, except for her anus left to protrude like a volcano crater. An "Englishwoman"—probably so because she represents civilizedness—kisses the gibbon's anus while it excretes matter in the last pangs of agony. Orgasmic reactions occur with the woman and with the viewers as well and naked, pure, raw being is made manifest

through the uselessness and gratuitousness of the sacrifice. The smell of death is mingled with that of excrement and of sexual pleasure (Bataille, 1993, 86).

David Crossen believes that the turds episode exerted a positive influence on Miller in that the hero is no longer obsessed with food, having reached an inner certainty sufficient to sustain him (Crossen, 1978, 110–111). It is a little far-fetched to assert with Crossen that Miller needed to see two turds floating in a *bidet* in order to reach inner equanimity, or with Alan Friedman who is convinced that Miller subsequently reached “an existential epiphany” (Friedman, 1966, 144). Nor do I quite agree with Balliet that Miller’s use of excremental imagery is simply to shock by letting the reader peek into an “elemental...subconscious level” (Balliet, 1996, 72).

Whether or not Miller found sudden enlightenment in the lumps of shit, or whether the reader gasped in horror at the depiction of the infamous act, I venture to say that, stylistically, the turds scene is an extreme example of the tenuous bond between the two sides of a sign: the semiotic compartmentalisation between shit and faith/ideals/philosophy is destroyed in the *bidet*, the new combination transposes the signifieds, and faith, ideals, and philosophy are equated with filth, foul smell, and putrefaction. The “enlightenment” occurs not with the narrator/hero but with the reader who grasps the ephemerality and conventionality of signs, of which the perception of the world is made. Concurrently, the shock is not only a moral or an etiquette one as much as it is one of semiotic perception.

The other side of these scatological experiences with faeces is revealed by Millett in her *Sexual Politics* where she asserts that defecation and orgasm are combined in Miller’s works in order to defile sexuality. This defilement carries on to the female figures in the text. Indeed, what Miller wants to do to woman, according to Millett, is to “shit on her” (Millett, 1971, 309). The debasement of woman and her revilement is made clear by Millett who adds that the “purpose of every [sexual] bout is the same: a demonstration of the hero’s self-conscious detachment before the manifestations of a lower order of life” (297). Women and filth are, lamentably, regarded by Miller as lower-order manifestations and thus to be treated with the same offhand aloofness and indifference.

Urine, along with excrement, also plays a part in Miller’s textual strategies, since the symbolic transgression of the function of the *bidet* by the Hindu disciple is to be restored. The man who uses the urinal—especially the French variety of it, according to Miller—is enjoying an unequalled freedom: standing in the middle of the street, surrounded by only a thin metal plate, he can offer himself to the voyeuristic fantasies of the passers-

by, have a clear conscience about it, and, in addition, perform the symbolic act of pissing on society itself. Furthermore, the pissing is equated with the act of writing, for emptying the bladder is equivalent to disgorging the flows of markedness, to the almost perverse pleasure of a voyeuristic Barthean reader: Miller recalls, fondly it seems, his many moments at the urinals and the women looking down at him from their balconies, their smiles breaking into little bits which are immediately gathered by the birds (*Black Spring*, 42).

A clean mind—and a clean, empty bladder!—is needed by the narrator/hero in order to face the many diseases of the modern world, the “black spring” of society, with equanimity and not a little humour as well.

The process of writing also cushions the writer, separates him from what is happening in the real world, transforms *mimesis* into *semiosis* in a realm where only the text exists. Miller-the-narrator sings of his inoculation against all diseases, all calamities and catastrophes. He will stay immune even if the world blows up, for he will be there just the same, gathering up his hyphens, commas, semicolons, and periods (*Cancer*, 151–52).

In fact, it is the text which celebrates its existence and its own survival through Miller. When *meaning* is forsaken and *signification* is apprehended, the reader can then, as if on a desert island, enjoy—even for a brief moment—the plurality and infinity of the text. But Miller does not need a desert island to express this textual plurality: the city with its bustling denizens is indeed one of his most striking and prolific matrices.

The City

Edward Mitchell, in his *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, categorically asserts that Miller’s “principal source for materials is, of course, the city itself” (Mitchell, 1971, xv), and we can translate this statement as meaning that among the many matrices through which *mimesis* is transformed into *semiosis*, the city matrix presents the reader with a plethora of stylistic features which successfully achieve the double pattern structure conducive to Millerian excess. Indeed, the city, especially Paris and New York, appears in the Millerian text under six sub-matrices: the city as social ill, the city as childhood dream, the city as text, the city as a place for dromomania, the city as carnivalesque and Dionysian, and the city as woman.

The extent of markedness present in the city matrix and the acute relationship between city and writer is best exemplified in the seminal Millerian theme that the city grows like a cancer, and the writer, in order to

retain his identity, must grow like a "sun," for the city, as a hungry louse, is to die of inanition, a process initiated by the writer. Taking upon himself the task of starving the white louse which is eating him, the writer will have to die as a city in order to become whole again, to become a man (*Capricorn*, 111). Fragmentation, *katábasis* and *palingénesis*, and scatology, all participate as matrices while the narrator is passing through the city initiation in order to continue his journey onward.

The imminence of the urban evil is foreshadowed in the following "vision:"

In the heat of the late afternoon the city rises up like a huge polar bear shaking off its rhododendrons. The forms waver, the gas chokes the girders, the smoke and the dust wave like amulets. Out of the welter of buildings there pours a jellywash of hot bodies glued together with pants and skirts...[under] the wet headlines are the diaphanous legs of the amoebas scrambling on to the running boards, the fine, sturdy tennis legs wrapped in cellophane, their white veins showing through the golden calves and muscles of ivory. The city is panting with a five o'clock sweat...A warm sultry haze lying over the city like a cup of fat, the sweat trickling down between the bare legs, around the slim ankles...The trolleys wheel round with iron mandibles, crunching the papier-mâché of the crowd, spooling it down like punched transfers. (*Black Spring*, 154-155)

A detailed stylistic analysis of the complete original passage reveals the extent of the damage made by the city and how stylistic *faits de style* act in accord with the text in order to give the matrix its specificity.

The lexicon used is rich and varied: "rhododendrons, girders, amulets, jellywash, diaphanous, amoebas, cellophane, mandibles, papier-mâché, etc." No effort is spared to produce a hallucinatory-like scene where meaning combines with sounds to produce impressions of amalgamation and suffocation. The morphemic plural /s/ is copiously added to further convey the impression of quantity and of the swirling masses: out of the 70 nouns in the original passage, 50 are in the regular plural form, while 9 are non-count nouns. It is as if the words can only come out in uncontrollable vast quantities from the text.

Syntactically speaking, the sentences show a predominance of Adj+N structures: "huge polar bear, hot bodies, diaphanous legs, sturdy tennis legs, white veins, golden calves," etc. The effect created is double: since declaration is a nominal function and description an adjectival one, the text fuses the two genres—unlike the surrealists who favour the use of nouns—into a unity of being, the assertion that things exist, and of appearance, the description of these things. The image is thus, if not as unusual as that of the surrealists, yet richer and more picturesque. The existing *thing* which is

expressed through the unconscious is given form and is anchored. The clauses in the passage are a mixture of finite and non-finite ones, with a predominance of non-finite verbs ending in -ing, giving the impression of slow continuous change without, however, mentioning any active, external, and identifiable agent. The city, like a huge organism, moves and changes from within and the plethora of NPs gives images of static yet insidiously moving nature. The sentences are far from being simple: compound and complex structures give time and space for the image to be expressed. Miller uses here a host of prepositions—more than 33 in the complete passage—and especially employs "like"-constructions four times to bring about an added sense of "rapprochement." It is worth noting that the only personal pronoun occurs in the very last sentence of the passage, and the "it" refers to the "papier-mâché of the crowd." The effect produced is to minimize the sense of rational life and to confer activity—albeit of a demonic nature—to the city that harbours its impersonal denizens. The impression given is that of a selfless and loveless machine of huge proportions devoid of any human feelings.

This last observation directly leads us to the semantic features of the text:

Feature /+ part of the body/: bodies, legs, veins, calves, muscles, sweat, fat, ankles, mandibles.

Feature /+ inanimate/: city, gas, girders, smoke, dust, buildings, boards, trolley wheels, iron mandibles, punched transfers.

The Feature /+ animate/ is thinly represented: polar bear, amoebas.

We have thus a "backward progression" from life at its most elemental form to the soulless modern city, the "iron mandibles" of which have crunched the crowd into a uniformed soup, where human beings survive in the form of mucus, sweat, fat, and grime:

/+ animate/: primordial life, serves as metaphor for the city

/+ part of the body/: semblance of humanity, impersonal

/+ inanimate/: the city, a soulless creature of steel and sweat

The city has taken on human attributes and has destroyed and vilified by the same token the life of the individual, depriving it of the remnants of humanity.

Another feature of this text closely similar to surrealist "principles" is the violation of selection—or restriction—rules, or what are also called collocation rules. When we read "the table sighs," there is a violation of a restriction rule that states that the verb "to sigh" requires a /+ animate/ subject. In the passage concerned, "the city rises up, the gas chokes the girders, the smoke and the dust wave like amulets, the city is panting," all

exemplify the transgressing of the rules of logical thinking and the juggling with the signifiers and the signifieds.

Another kind of semantic violation is that of contextual features where words must agree with each other in adequate—i.e., accepted by the “norm”—referential relationships: “the five o’clock sweat, the wet headlines, (the) muscles of ivory, the papier-mâché of the crowd.”

The image left by the sub-matrix “society as social ill” in this example is one of semantic loss: the signified “mankind” usually bound to the signifier “city” is torn up from its semiotic make up and replaced by sememes denoting lifeless forms. What is left of mankind is frantically trying to escape the nightmare of civilisation, but only disappointment awaits civilised beings even as they scurry to the four corners of the earth.

The city, paradoxically in this sinister setting, also stands for the lost happiness of childhood. It is an illusion, however, brought about by the veil of memory which throws a shine over the days of yore when everything was intact. Childhood is divided into a “Fourteenth Ward” (*Black Spring*, 3) and a “Street of Early Sorrows” (*Nexus*, 82), the stages where fragmentation begins to appear, a fragmentation which brings with it, surprisingly, not differentiation but uniformity:

As a mere lad—in the old neighbourhood—I had been accustomed to mixing with half-wits, incipient gangsters, petty crooks, would-be prize fighters, epileptics, drunks and sluts. Everyone in that dear ancient world was a ‘character’. But in the new neighbourhood to which I had been transferred everyone was normal, matter of fact, non-spectacular. (*Plexus*, 168)

The reader is faced with two facts: differentiation is unity and uniformity is fragmentation. Put in semiological terms, the apparent uniformity of mimesis is in reality fragmentary: what the text shows as being co-related with reality is in fact a vastly complex order of sign-system, whereas the apparent markedness of semiosis hides the unity of signification. The street and memory have served as allegories to this double process.

What springs to mind here is Walter Benjamin’s association between the city and memories. Very much like Miller in his major works, Benjamin wrote in 1932: “I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life—bios—graphically on a map” (Benjamin, 1985, 295). Life is likened to a huge map, the charting of which is equated with the reconstruction of the past in a labyrinthine manner, with “entrances” Benjamin calls “primal acquaintances,” each of which is “a graphic symbol of my acquaintance with a person whom I met, not through other people, but through neighbourhood, family relationships, school comradeship,

mistaken identity, companionship on travels...” (319). The self reconstructs itself in an allegorical city in which the roads, boulevards, intersections, and crossings are signs of one’s own criss-crossed life.

In this context, Benjamin’s differentiation between reminiscences and autobiography is worth noting, especially since it is a difference based on moments as opposed to narrative. To him, the former is a space, a discontinuity, an image that springs to memory, whereas the latter is a time and a sequence (316). The interesting bit is that this is precisely the difference I have been stressing all along: the flow of the narratorial autobiographical fiction in Miller is counterbalanced by the sudden and surprising *moments* when the image strikes in a discontinuity that makes itself and the preceding flow even more conspicuous.

The sub-matrix “city as text,” then, is also another allegory of reading, where the writer is likened to an explorer who, wanting to navigate around the world, does so without a compass. The story, for having been dreamed for so long, becomes a vast city opposing its fortified walls to the writer-wanderer who is too exhausted to enter and who is faced anyway with an unattainable citadel ghostly floating, as it were, in the clouds. Wandering again and again amidst the web of crisscrossed tracks, the writer-wanderer forever tries to gain a solid foothold from which he can command a view of his life (*Capricorn*, 304–405). This commanding view of life is a perspective, a sequence, from which is gathered a spatial plan or overview. Miller’s writing enacts this double movement of sequence and stasis, of walking down the streets while being at the same time above and beyond it. Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy* (1990) aptly comes to mind: the various protagonists use the streets of New York as a giant board on which they write letters and words. The text is written over the city pattern in a dialectical movement between sequence and moment. In other words, the city is actually being *narrated* and language superimposed on it.

Miller the writer acknowledges the ultimate victory of the text. Whereas others have compared the writer to a hunter in the forest of the text, Miller goes further: the story built is forever unattainable, for the author is permitted only the luxury of admiring its majestic walls. All the city gates are shut tight, and the city lives by itself. It is only when the author is dead that the text—and hence the reader—can live. The city matrix is in fact the personification of the text, for as the discourse is structured according to its different registers, the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic ones, likewise the city exhibits a similar organisation: apartments are phonemes, buildings are morphemes, streets are the syntax, and the rules governing the life of the city, the order imposed, are mirrored in the

semantic side of the language. It is in such a city that Miller lives, and the "crisscrossed tracks," the "confused encircling," and the "spasmodic gambit," are the images by which the city and language are expressed.

The next sub-matrix, the city as place for dromomania, would seem to contradict the preceding one, where I said that the author is not allowed entry into his creation, but in fact he can only beg entrance as a flâneur who does not *design* the city as much as he *works* with it. Levi-Strauss' distinction here is crucial: unlike the engineer who creates the materials he needs and builds something out of nothing or, at least, out of newly fabricated objects, the bricoleur always works with second-hand materials (Wiseman, 1997, 79). The flâneur nature of Miller is as famous as that of the surrealists. Jay Martin tells of Miller's job in Paris, which was "merely circulating, surrendering to chance encounters" and adds that anything he did, "any way the streets took him, might turn up an interesting sight" (Martin, 1979, 190). Paul Jackson takes the psychological side of the flâneur process and associates it with Miller's anxiety at reconstructing the lost original unity; "integration" is arrived at by "literally outwalking urban tension" (Jackson, 1976, 9). By pacing to and fro, Miller tries to retrace his steps back to the time before fragmentation, by ritually dancing over the same spot which saw his moments of joy and his moments of demise. Walking in the text, Breton-like, Miller lets himself "go" with the tide, not making any resistance to the dictates of fate, whatever might happen. Walking in the street-as-text, Miller and the world remain intact (*Cancer*, 103).

Riding with the tide, not offering any resistance, in a way reminiscent of surrealist automatism, the Millerian flâneur explores the paradoxically infinite boundaries of the city and of language: riding his bicycle, Miller reaches a bridge in Sèvres paved with cobble-stones and, through the propagating vibrations, undergoes an epiphany where all bridges are crossed simultaneously, where one experience equates all others (*Black Spring*, 40–41).

But is Miller really a flâneur after all, and how does this concept relate to excess and deviation? Does his flânerie consist in "strolling at an overtly leisurely pace, allowing oneself to be drawn by intriguing sights or to dawdle in interesting places" (Shields, 1994, 65)? Is his activity that of "the sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find the things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence..." (Tester, 1994, 7)? Or is Miller Georg Simmel's Stranger, he "who arrives today and stays tomorrow," settling in the city but preserving his difference and his outsider status (Shields, 1994, 68)? Are the ten years in Paris recounted in Miller's major

works those of a Stranger? Are the remaining years in America those of a flâneur? Can Miller be both and, as Rob Shields masterfully says in the context of the flâneur, achieve the status where the "*Stranger is thus a foreigner who becomes like a native, whereas the flâneur is the inverse, a native who becomes like a foreigner*" (68)?

I would prefer, however, to categorise the Millerian hero as neither a real flâneur nor a real Stranger only, but as a *talker*. Indeed, the city serves as the arena where the character *interacts* and *talks*—a language of excess—with others or, if these be not available, with himself. Again the narrative dimension of the Millerian text is evident: the city provides the medium through which speech/writing is carried along the lanes, the streets, and the avenues; incidents stop the flow to reveal the *moment*, the stoppage of time in the bustling narrative of the city-text.

In this context, mimesis and semiosis are also explored by the narrator: literature is, of course, semiosis, but it is also invention and creation. Even though Miller's writings all revolve around semiosis, his narrator asserts the primacy of the street experience, where to be born in the street is to wander, as a free person, all his life, where accident, incident, drama, movement, and dream all give his wandering a "metaphysical" certainty. What is not in the immediate, open street, is false, "that is to say, *literature*" (*Black Spring*, 3).

In this confused view one can glimpse Miller's uneasy relationship with the surrealists: on the one hand, the "harmony of irrelevant facts" fits perfectly into the scheme of rapprochement dear to the French school, and the "metaphysical certitude" is that of finding the "inner man" amidst the debris of modern civilised life. On the other hand, the surrealists never advocated the reduplication of life "in the open street," nor did they accept, however, the term "literature" to be stamped on their productions. While Miller looked at the street as provender for his day-to-day experiences, the surrealists looked at it for the place where the magic of chance encounter would happen. The street, to both, was a text where signs would fight their last and most beautiful battle.

Battle and carnival are not so distant from each other as one might think. Richard Lehan suggests that "beneath the surface of the modern city are forces at work as old as our origins. These forces have taken many shapes. Dionysus embodies the disruptive force in the city; his spirit is later embodied by the carnival..." (Lehan, 1998, 6). We have also seen Bataille's view of expenditure earlier, and the fight of signs, as well as the dance of signs, is a token of pure energy displayed as excess. Paris, the city favoured and loved above all both by surrealists and by Miller, is the site of the expenditure of excess. To Parkin, in his comparative study of Rabelais and

Miller, Paris is a "carnavalesque" city providing a key experience to the American narrator (Parkin, 1990, 135). During periods of carnival, constraints become lax and excesses otherwise prohibited are allowed. Similarly, the carnivalesque nature of Paris, which can be, as I have shown, the equivalent of the Millerian text, allows the discourse to take on paths otherwise perilously trodden: Paris is taken as a vehicle for stylistic markedness and its accompanying images:

On a Sunday afternoon, when the shutters are down and the proletariat possesses the street in a kind of dumb torpor, there are certain thoroughfares which remind one of nothing less than a big chancrous cock laid open longitudinally. (*Cancer*, 47)

Notice how it is the *proletariat* who "possesses" the streets, and not the upper classes, for the former are the followers of Dionysus whereas the latter are those of Apollo. One can note here that for all their political espousal of the "masses" and the workers, the surrealists' image rarely portrays filthy or even common people, preferring to use the bourgeoisie they so despised. On a "Sunday afternoon," the day when even God, symbol of order, rested, it is the populace who takes control of the discourse, impervious to any sanction. The Dionysiac textual markedness then flows all over the city-text, even if the beautiful thoroughfares of Apollo appear to be untouched. The truth is that markedness, as Nietzsche remarked, *flows* over unmarkedness and leaves a scent hard to forget. The ghetto, a Dionysian haven *par excellence*, spills uncontrollably in this dithyramb:

The ghetto!...Words are dragged like ermine through the spilt sawdust; growling, guttural dogs paw the air. Spangled women choked with nars doze heavily in their richly upholstered caskets of flesh. The magnetic fury of lust concentrates in dark, mahogany eyes. (*Sexus*, 393)

Markedness can be seen as the ghetto of the text-as-city, and the death of childhood, the mourning over the lost unity, can only be restored in the ghetto-text as madness opposed to reason. The ghetto always takes its revenge at the end in a show of seeming madness that topples the dictates of reason and order, an order symbolised by the Xerxes Society founded by Miller and his friends:

He slowed down a little, put his hand to his back trousers pocket and brought out the miniature knife with the pearl handle. Now he whirled faster and faster, and as he shrieked '*Cossaken! Hutzulies! Gozlonem! Merder! Font-Ganef!*' he stabbed himself over and over, in the arms, in the legs, in the stomach, eyes, nose, ears, mouth,

until he was nothing but a mass of wounds...With this the ten members of the Xerxes Society rushed to the door; as they stepped across the threshold Sheldon, who had drawn his automatic, shot them down one by one, yelling '*A misse meshune of sea... Hutzulies, Gozlonem, Merder, Cossaken!*' (*Plexus*, 199)

This Maenadic display of furore, typically Dionysian, brings us to the last city sub-matrix, that of the city as woman. I showed earlier, in Part I, that Paris to the surrealists was a woman to be pacified and adored, and the similarity with Miller's text has prompted J. D. Brown to describe the American writer's urban scenes as "surrealist rendering of Parisian street life" (Brown, 1986, 10). According to Linda Williams, Paris, to Miller, is at the same time a woman, a mother, and a whore (Williams, 1991, 26) and the bed, where the hero spends so much time in sexual acts, is the microcosm of the city (28). To Nelson, Paris is the archetypal feminine and the real Paris never appears in Miller's descriptions of the city (Nelson, 1970, 23-24) whereas to Lehrer, who follows in the footsteps of Jane Nelson, the city, and specifically Paris, is Miller's unconscious desire to return to the womb (Lehrer, 1975, 9).

Paris is sung about with more benevolent features than the American city, those of the untouchable damsel of medieval lays: she stands majestically over the river, fair, soft, gemlike, and totally holy (*Black Spring*, 192). In other places, Paris is depicted as a whore: seen from a distance, she looks marvellous, and one can't wait to embrace her; yet after a few minutes a feeling of emptiness and disgust pervades the beholder who suddenly feels cheated (*Cancer*, 211)

Whatever the Jungian interpretations given, it would be more interesting—and more productive—to think of the connection between the city and woman in the same light as that between the text and the city. I would like to recall Breton's words quoted earlier: "The words have stopped playing. The words are making love." (Breton, *Les Pas Perdus*, 141) and insist on the stylistic features of the Millerian text: whether the city—here Paris—is a mother, a saint, or a whore, Miller is "making love" to this city-as-woman in the same way as the words are making love in a surrealist text. By providing a second level of reading, a double patterning of the structure, and a convergence of all *faits de style*, the Millerian text is indeed making love to the city, i.e., making love to itself, and what better metaphor to use than that of the woman? It is in this respect that the sub-matrix of the city-as-woman should be understood, in addition to the fact that, contrary to the somewhat pompous attitude of Breton and the refusal of the ludic element of markedness, Miller's text exhibits those double patterning features which

precisely allow for a dissemination of meaning very conducive to the pure pleasure of the reader.

This last sub-matrix of city as woman directs now my investigation to the matrix of woman *per se* and to her stylistic role and function in the Millerian text.

Woman

The matrix "woman" is, along with that of the city, maybe the most important aspect of the Millerian text's markedness, and the locus of much discussion, controversy, and consequently of much confusion. Seen under the light of any stylistic *fait de style*, however, much of the mystery vanishes and is replaced by a carefully thought-out and structured matrix. With the addition of a corresponding surrealist tradition that takes woman, sex, and love, as fundamental aspects of its literariness, an even deeper insight into the workings of the woman matrix is reached.

Balliet pursues the thread of the woman image through her concept of the expansion/contraction mechanism: the innumerable sememes attached to the woman image expand the initial element but then almost concomitantly produce a semantic contraction that is, ultimately, detrimental to the first element. The reader, after being exposed to a widening effect, for example, "she has jackal paws," experiences a "negative reaction to the imagery" and the woman, "while more than 'woman,' is actually less than woman," since she is deformed by the comparison (Balliet, 1996, 135). One wonders, however, why such a mechanism exists in the first place if it is bound to collapse both itself and the effect produced on the reader.

Gordon is after issues of literary influence when he states that Miller the writer was marked by Breton's *Nadja* and Rider Haggard's *She* in his later depiction of the absolute woman (Gordon, 1968, 30). It is this absolute woman who provides, according to Gordon, the fulcrum on which the whole of mankind's existence is carefully poised:

The liberation of man's creative powers depends upon his passing beyond the sensual to the ideal, the divine. But if his search for the ideal is not firmly rooted in biological reality, which is reducible to passionate sex, then his hold on reality disappears, and his thought is dry and abstract. In preserving the balance between ideal and real, man needs woman; for it is she who remains firmly rooted in the earth. (140)

In other words, what Gordon is implying—without maybe being aware of it—is that the woman matrix holds features of markedness that keep the stylistic effect of the text from collapsing into boredom and repetition, and enables the reader to link the *faits de style* with concrete reality without, however, completely returning back to the level of mimesis. Ihab Hassan firmly holds the same view as Gordon, and ascribes great authority to what Miller had to say about the subject, quoting him prophetically asserting:

I have a strange feeling that the next great impersonation of the future will be a woman... When men are at last united in darkness woman will once again illumine the way—by revealing the beauties and mysteries which enfold us. We have tried to hide from our sight the womb of night, and now we are engulfed in it. (quoted in Hassan, 1968, 51)

By trying to dismiss the "mystery" of the woman/female principle, i.e., by trying to suppress the unknown, the marked features that violate the reader's understanding of mimesis, that same reader is forced into the semantic world of semiosis where logic, reason, and the search for an ultimate meaning are all baffled. Interestingly enough, the Dionysian principle has always been represented not only as a young man, but also as embodying the female principle. Indeed, some see Dionysus as the first feminist in history (Thro, 1996, 3). With this in mind, we find that the celebration of woman as the restorer of the balance, as the revealer of secrets, and as the force that will engulf man—reason—is in fact the restoration of the Dionysian text, and thus of markedness.

Other critics have decided to overpass stylistic considerations and have concentrated instead on the cultural and gender issues of Miller's writings, arguing that the Millerian hero is the perfect example of the "macho" man. Holdefer adds to this that "much of Miller's writing about sex and the mysteries of 'cunt' has a decidedly old-fashioned air. One hears an avuncular, rambling voice from another age, the sensibility of another world. What is supposed to be frank or dirty is, in many passages, tedious" (Holdefer, 1993, 64). William H. Gass is keen on showing the "other side of Miller's work" as it takes "disgraceful proportions, like a budding wart" (Gass, 1976, 37) and dismissively sums up the author's mistreatment of women in his work for they are "to be mastered, subjugated, like masticated food, without emotion, with the carelessness and detachment of a professional and an arrogance which is purely male..." (35). Kate Miller's famous attack¹⁰ is epitomized in her pronouncement that Miller's "most original contribution to sexual attitudes is confined to giving the first full expression to an ancient sentiment of contempt" (Millett, 1971, 309). She

adds that Miller's "fantasy drama is sternly restricted to the dissociated adventures of cunt and prick" (299), and that woman is nothing more than a tool for the male's pleasure, the best "fucks" being with "simpletons" (300), women who do not bother Miller or challenge him intellectually or otherwise. Conversely, what she calls "pecker power" is a representation of the male as the container of a mind as opposed to the metonymical relationship between the "pure cunt" and lack of mentality of the female characters in his works (300).

One cannot brush aside such comments, even if the aim of this study is to come to grips with the stylistic peculiarities of the Millerian text. The contemporary reader will hardly be in agreement with Norman Mailer who, enraptured, almost shouted in ecstasy:

[H]e captured something in the sexuality of men as it had never been seen before, precisely that it was man's sense of awe before woman, his dread of her position one step closer to eternity (for in that step were her powers) which made men detest women, revile them, humiliate them, defecate symbolically on them, do everything to reduce them so one might dare to enter them and take pleasure of them. (quoted in Culler, 1983, 48)

Mailer goes to the extent of equating Miller's writing with "fucking:"

Sometimes, his [Miller's] writing even has the form of a fuck. All the roar of passion, the flaming poetry, the passing crazy wit, and not an instant of intellectual precision, no products of Mind but insights instead which smuck the brain like a bonny hit which plops full of fucky happy presence over your nostrils. (Mailer, 1976, 92)

The wild, almost senseless scenes of sexual encounters mirror the Maenadic frenzies of the followers of Dionysus.

The Millerian text spares no effort to depict woman under most marked traits, especially those women who are associated, either by their nature or by their acts, to features of Dionysian aspect, such as Alraune in "Scenario:"

The heavy face of Alraune hovers over the garden like a mask. The face grows larger and larger until it fills the screen. Her mouth is clouded with smoke which ascends in spiral curves. The eyes roll upward; they have the fixed stare of a drug addict. They grow round, large, glassy, then troubled, then wild. They twitch like the eyes of a Javanese dancer. They grow calm and fixed again, dreamy, like the eyes of an opium smoker. (*Selected Prose II*, 434)

Darkness, vagueness, hypnotic and trance-like behaviour envelop the depiction of woman who has lost all semantic connection with mimesis:

[Cleo] is boneless, milky, drugged: a medusa with a straw wig undulating in a lake of glass beads. (*Scout*, 437)

Indeed, the women Miller-the-narrator remembers most vividly are not to be seen on the plane of reality but more on that of image-generators and devices used by the text to create markedness:

Queer doglike women with furry heads and always an alarm clock or a jigsaw puzzle hidden in the wrong place .. Queer dogfaced women in stiff collars, the lips drooping, the eyes twitching. (*Black Spring*, 164)

The relationship between obscenity and markedness or unmarkedness is an interesting issue worth exploring. What about the women in the unmarked passages? Contrary to the expectations, it seems that Miller's "obscenity," what the critics have sometimes called "pornography" and the unwelcome misogyny with the attending debasement of woman, is remarkable only in the context of the unmarked passages, since it is on that level that specific connotations with sexual imagery can be associated with meaning. The shift from meaning to signification, already explained, robs the "obscene" or "pornographic" passages, in a marked context, of meaning-oriented interpretations. As such, marked obscenity acquires a more Bataillean sense of excess, expenditure, and sacrifice.

Miller's male attitude is also interestingly mirrored in his treatment of excess: it is clear by now that Miller not only controls the flow of excess in his text, but he also allocates, economically, marked and unmarked passages in a way which provides maximum deviatory effects on the reader. Miller thus stands opposite from the surrealists whose excess has no boundaries and spills to such an extent that saturation sets in. But isn't Miller's technique a *male* model of sexual expenditure? Isn't the rest period between the marked passages paralleled by the male rest between orgasms? The control exerted on excess, different from that of the French surrealists and from Bataille's, comes thus closer to a male economy of deviation production.

The most important sub-matrices of the main woman matrix are woman as womb, woman as Lilith, and woman as genitalia.

AS THE dictionary says, the womb is the place where anything is engendered or brought to life. As far as I can make out, there is never anything but womb. First and last there is the womb of Nature; then there is the mother's womb, and finally there is the womb in which we have our life and being and which we call the world. (*U isdom*, 94)

Mathieu's Orphic study of Miller's works, along with the useful *katábasis-palingénesis* notion, introduces the *descensus ad infernos* and *regressus ad uterum* motif (Mathieu, 1976b, 53). The quester, in his descent to hell, must also pass through a second birth, a return to the womb that begot him in order to fathom the mysteries of existence. The first birth was experienced in oblivion and the painful memory of the event has to be relived so that the trauma is transformed into re-integration and fusion.

After the expulsion from the paradise of undifferentiated unconsciousness, after the expulsion from the security and warmth of the mother's womb, man, who, unlike woman, cannot even re-create the mystery within himself, yearns for re-assimilation. But the return to the womb is a dangerous journey, for the self is threatened by extinction and the return to the formless void: Jay Martin remarked of Miller (referring to the author) that he "felt he was asked to become more and more helpless, not to grow up but to become smaller each day until he could at last be tucked back into the womb—of mother, of Pauline, of Beatrice, utterly defeated by them" (Martin, 1979, 75). Nelson also sees the narrator in a constant struggle between the female, as symbolised by the womb, and the developing self (Nelson, 1970, 94–95) who is torn between two tantalising choices: either the going back to the warmth and security of the womb and the dissolution as self—and as writer,—or the staying in the cold insecurity and responsibility of the outside world and the keeping of the self. In this context, Parl speaks of the womb/tomb opposition (Parl, 1979, 79) with all the connotations this carries. Undifferentiation is equated with death, even though the alternative, the world, is also separation and fragmentation.

It is within this excruciating dilemma that the narrator must work and his very existence as *writer* is threatened in the process: is he to bask in a relative security, or unmarkedness, and *lose his self as a writer*, as a Bloomean would-be "esthete," or is he to boldly advance in the open fields of markedness and *establish* himself in a discourse that renegates its own *mother*, as esthetes struggle to get rid of their predecessors? But the life in the womb is a necessary step in the gestation of the writer, for in the fecundating womb only can he escape the discord and confusion of the outer world (*Capricorn*, 9).

The "reality" of mimesis, the undifferentiation of the return to the womb, the search for an ultimate *meaning*, is forever in conflict with the "chaos" of semiosis, even though the two live side by side in the text, even though chaos and the womb interchange roles: when everything is withdrawn "again" into the womb of time, chaos will be restored and the

world will be a reality to write upon (*Cancer*, 10). Tania, the embodiment of the text, is the double pattern that accepts all variations:

But there is another Tania.. [who] is a fever, too—*les voies urinaires*, Café de la Liberté, Place des Vosges, bright neckties on the Boulevard Montparnasse, dark bathrooms, Porto Sec...acromegaly, cancer and delirium, warm veils, poker chips, carpets of blood and soft thighs. (12–13)

The two Tanias, appearing in the mirror as the narrator writes, direct the discursive path of the text. The one Miller-the-narrator is concerned with typifies the feverish expenditure which transgresses normative laws and expands like a cancer, deforming the extremities in acromegaly, reeking with lust and with Dionysian frenzy.

Apart from female figures representing the Great Mother, Jane Nelson asserts in her Jungian study of Miller's imagery that some of these figures are also of a "devouring" and "chthonic" kind (Nelson, 1970, 29–30) that dangerously threaten the narrator in his quest to achieve self-identification. What Nelson has in mind is, principally, the character called Mona or Mara with whom Miller has a long relationship spanning most of the *Tropics* and certainly all of the *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy.

The term "Mara" itself goes a long way in adding to the signification of the character's role and function in the text and in the woman matrix: according to the Webster's definition, Mara is in Hindu mythology "the god of death, sometimes seen as one aspect of a god whose other aspect is Kama, or erotic desire." True, the Webster's ascribes to Mara a male sex, and it is as such that Mara tempts the Buddha—Siddharta Gautama—in the latter's final moments before attaining Buddhahood. As such, it also represents the power of illusion. Mara is thus the text's personification not of reality but of a higher level of signification—semiosis—linked to the "erotic" devices of the discourse. As a symbol both of death—according to the Webster's—and of eroticism, we can safely conclude that it also represents the Freudian duality of Thanatos and Eros, the two drives that struggle for ascendancy in man's psyche, and thus again we find the ubiquitous double pattern in this specific sub-matrix acting as a balancing force in the text.

Mona/Mara's image has been variously described as the dark wood to descend to (Crossen, 1978, 171), a "beast in hiding" (Martin, 1979, 98), a "network of contradictions" (Decker, 1996, 175), and the *Rosy Crucifixion's* "muse antagonist" (188). It is interesting to read what Miller himself thought of June Mansfield, the actual Mona/Mara in order to see how this image got transferred into the text, in a letter to his friend Emil Schnellock

in 1933 where one can also, incidentally, see why Miller was accused of misogyny:

And yet there is this June, this damned Jewish vulture gnawing into my vitals whether I want it or not—first with her possessivity, her jealousy, her overwhelming sex and clawing beak, and now with hatred and malice and vindictiveness. (Wickes, 1990, 121)

In the text, June undergoes the transformation necessary to make of her a vehicle of discursive markedness as can be recalled in a passage quoted earlier where she appears in the guise of a creature half-bird half-jackal (*Black Spring*, 156–57). The features +animal, +bird, and +death are evident. Another passage is even more explicit as to the characteristics of this mysterious creature:

Haunting nights when...I saw nothing but her eyes and in those eyes, rising like bubbling pools of lava, phantoms came to the surface, faded, vanished, reappeared, bringing dread, apprehension, fear, mystery. (Sexton, 192)

There are more indications in the above passage of the illusory-like nature of Mara, and of her coming back from the land of the dead in human shape to seduce the unwary. Death, beauty, elusiveness, seduction: the semantic features point out to a correlate in the figure of the legendary/mythical Lilith.

Indeed, the earliest references to a female demon go back to Mesopotamia where the "lilitu" and "ardat-lili" represent a she-demon who "is not a wife, a mother; she has not known happiness, has not undressed in front of her husband, has no milk in her breasts" (Black and Green, 1992, 118). From Mesopotamia the figure of the "lilitu" was adopted by the Jews and transferred to Jewish mythology in the form of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* which records the earliest version of the Lilith legend known to most people, a document dated between the 8th and 10th centuries. The story goes that God first created a woman for Adam from the earth, just like he created man, and called her Lilith. However, Lilith would fight with Adam and refused to lie below him while making love. Adam retorted: "I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be in the superior one." Lilith responded: "We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth." Ultimately, Lilith ran away, and God punished her by having one hundred of her children die every day. To avenge for her loss, Lilith takes infants from their cradles and kills them (Humm, 1999, 1).

Lilith is also the arch-succubus, a female demon that comes to sleeping men and extracts their semen by producing erotic dreams (Humm, 1999, 2). A Talmudic text, b. Shab. 151b, quotes Rabbi Hanina saying: "One may not sleep alone in a house, for Lilith takes hold of whoever sleeps alone in a house," and another text, b. Nidda 24b, classifies Lilith as "a demoness with a human appearance except that she has wings" (1).

Other traditions make of Lilith the queen of vampires, and either the consort or the daughter of Dracula (Humm, 1999, 2), as we can find echoes in *Tropic of Capricorn* where June is shown wearing only black clothes with no underwear, and moving in a world of darkness amidst black books, black plates, and everyday black utensils. Even the sun becomes permanently blacked out, as if to aid her and Miller in their everlasting dark strife (*Capricorn*, 211).

All the above features are present in what is most probably the most intensely marked passage in all of Miller's works, spanning a surprising fourteen pages, where the narrator describes his satanic relationship with Mona/Mara as seen from a symbolic bottom at the "neck of the Bottle," a prison from which he cannot easily break free:

In heat she focussed on the grand cosmocrator, her eyes rolled back to the whites, her lips a-saliva. In the blind hole of sex she waltzed like a trained mouse, her jaws unhinged like a snake's, her skin horripilating in barbed plumes. (212)¹¹

As Lilith, she combines treachery with the demonic violence of birds of prey as she used to swoop suddenly on her victims, ferociously devouring their internal organs, and disappearing in the twinkling of an eye (213). Everyday, Mona/Mara/Lilith had to allow her wings to become swifter, had to grow sharper jaws, and had to develop more piercing eyes (219) in order to seduce her prey, and as succubus she remained intact despite everything. Her gaze, as suits one of her kind, had a hypnotising fixity, and her eyes, even in her sleep, continued to flutter under the eyelids, the only outward sign of life left in her (221). And everyday Mona took off on black wings in search of fresh victims (222).

But Mona, just like her Jewish counterpart, had been forced into taking this hideous role, or, rather, because of a mistake, had to pay the price. Mona, in symbolic flights out of herself, tries to get rid of her identity by any means, for no matter how self-confident she appeared, one could feel the terror which was overwhelming her. She was, at the same time, yielding to her destiny and tragically trying to overcome it (222).

Yet *Mona-Lilith* is most importantly an allegory of discourse: even as Lilith is created on a par with Adam in the Garden of Eden, so markedness is

justified in the garden of the text; even as Lilith will not bow down and submit to the superior sexual stance of Adam and tries to retain the right to remain "on top," so markedness retains the right to effect a semiotic re-reading which is only partly based on mimesis; even as Lilith is banished from Paradise for her disobedience, so literary "deviation" is shunned and driven away from the norm; even as Lilith exacts revenge from the sons of man and pursues them in their dreams, so the Dionysian aspects of the text come back with a vengeance and, in the "dream" level of signification, as opposed to that of reality, Lilith shines with all her "dark" stylistic powers. Furthermore, as Gregory Stephenson accurately points out, June is the Alraune in Miller's "Scenario" (Stephenson, 1998, 90) in her embodiment of the Dionysiac frenzy and power of darkness.

But, one may object, Miller-the-narrator is not preaching for a textual condition where Lilith has the upper hand, for, as I have said, he is a prisoner and as a prisoner his first duty is to escape his gaoler. However, and as a tribute to the Lilithian side of the double pattern, the Millerian text loses its appeal on the reader in direct inverse proportion with the power of Lilith. To be clearer, the moment Miller is avowedly freed from Mona/Mara, the decline of his stylistic impact begins: *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *The Rosy Crucifixion*, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* form the nexus of Miller's originality. After that, he unfortunately lapses into the common day-to-day ramblings of a writer who has nothing terrifically new to offer. *With the end of Mona-Lilith comes the end of the Millerian text with its marked/unmarked stylistic structure.*

From the image of woman to that of her body and finally to the locus of her sexual activity Miller follows a metonymical progression (Friedman, 1966, 147-148). I have pointed at the fragmentation effected by the surrealist and Millerian blazoning, and it is here, in the matrix of "Woman as genitalia," that Miller is guilty of dispossessing woman of everything except her purely sexual attributes. As Millett rightly pointed out, Miller is far from being a follower in D. H. Lawrence's footsteps, such a suggestion "certain to have outraged the master had he lived to be so affronted," especially since the "liturgical pomp with which Lawrence surrounded sexuality bears no resemblance to Miller's determined profanity" (Millett, 1971, 296). If Lawrence was dead serious about sexuality, and his women were generally persons "of considerable strength and intelligence" (297), Miller was completely uninterested in the personality of his sexual partners. He "simply converts woman to 'cunt'—thing, commodity, matter;" to him, there is "no personality to recognize or encounter," and thus he lacks "the psychological subtleties of Lawrence's Freudian wisdom" (297). Fragmentation attains

such a high degree that sexuality becomes almost nonexistent and gives place to the mere hunt for the female genitalia, with a disregard for anything else. As Millett again points out:

In the surfeit of Miller's perfervid "fucking," it is surprising how much of sexuality is actually omitted: intimacy, for example, or the aesthetic pleasures of nudity. A very occasional pair of "huge teats" or "haunches" are poor and infrequent spare parts for the missing erotic form of woman. (299)

On the opposite scale, however, other critics see the "Woman as genitalia" sub-matrix differently. The female sexual organ is, according to Crossen, the "key" that will unlock the mystery of love in *Black Spring* (Crossen, 1978, 134). Norman Mailer praised Miller's candid yet forceful depiction of sexual acts and hailed, in chthonic overtones, his unabashed "speleological" forays into female genitalia:

Never has literature and sex lived in such symbiotic relation before—it is as if every stroke of his phallus is laying a future paragraph of phrases on his brain. He is the Grand Speleologist of the vagina—out of the sensations of those caverns will he rediscover every item in the world. (Mailer, 1976, 90)

And, like real-world speleologists, Miller directs powerful lights on the mystery of the female genitalia, just to discover that, after all, it is nothing but a "fissure," and that much of the importance accorded to it is illusory. In a famous passage, Miller has Joe describe him how, aroused by curiosity, he took his flashlight one night and trained it on the genitals of the woman lying next to him in bed. Miller finds Joe amazed by the realisation that the more he looked at it, the less interesting it became, and the more he thought about it, the more he became aware that it was just a "crack" between the legs. It was so absolutely meaningless that it fascinated him (*Cancer*, 144-45). But even then, the attraction of unmysteriousness is itself mysterious; nothing in the text, *per se*, is unmarked, and we are reminded of Riffaterre's warning that words in themselves are neither marked nor unmarked, it is what the reader makes of them which produces the *faits de style*.

The symbiotic relationship Mailer speaks of is, indeed, the link between the proairetic actions of sexual nature and the structure of the text itself. From a metonymical point, caves, caverns, and vagina form an underground passage both into the deeper layers of the separation-fragmentation matrix and into the discourse embodying such matrices¹².

The sub-matrix "woman as genitalia" accounts for unusual markedness in the Millerian text and, when taken in conjunction with the other matrices,

is readily accepted by the reader on the semiotic level. The mystery of the vagina is that of the "unstitched wound:"

But the ass! The ass is worn down, scraped, sandpapered, smooth, hard, bright as a billiard ball or the skull of a leper... Suddenly I see a dark, hairy crack in front of me set in a bright, polished billiard ball; the legs are holding me like a pair of scissors. A glance at that dark, unstitched wound and a deep fissure in my brain opens up... an evacuation that leaves me face to face with the Absolute. (*Cancer*, 247-248)

The opposition between the ass, white, scraped, smooth, bright like a billiard ball, *unmarked*, and the recesses of the "unstitched wound," with the corresponding sememes of darkness, fluidity, undifferentiated masses of blood and gore, *marked*, is primordial. It triggers in the narrator the sudden realisation that two worlds, two realities, are at war in woman and hence in creation: order and chaos, knowledge and mystery, certainty and doubt, unmarkedness and markedness. The vision of the "unstitched wound" explodes the logical barriers set up by reason: labels, tags, and appellations are unhooked and yanked out of their places; and what is a label but a signifier to which a signified is arbitrarily associated? At the sight of the "Absolute" of the unexplainable text, the army of signifiers, like ants, desert the battlefield and the signification of the discourse, free from the limits of the norm, takes over.

Semiotic signification and its consequent stylistic peculiarities—for each artisan-writer partly works the linguistic corpus according to his/her skill, and is partly governed by this same corpus—produce a diversity of recognizable styles and texts. Metaphorically, each "cunt"/text is different: although it belongs to a specific woman/writer, yet it leads an existence of its own:

There are cunts which laugh and cunts which talk: there are crazy, hysterical cunts shaped like ocarinas and there are planturous, seismographic cunts which register the rise and fall of sap: there are cannibalistic cunts which open wide like the jaws of the whale and swallow alive... there are dithyrambic cunts which dance at the very approach of the penis and go wet all over in ecstasy... (*Capricorn*, 176)

Crossen's vagina "key" concept becomes clearer when the reader realises that the female genitalia matrix encompasses, and, so to speak, encapsulates other matrices: laughing, crazy, hysterical, flute-playing, cannibalistic, dithyrambic, they are the dancing Maenads; seismographic and shell-like, they are chthonic; sappy, whalish, swallowing, and wet, they are whale-like. The narrator as Pinocchio enjoys the luxurious danger and, at the

same time, the safety of the womb where he can lay "like a dolphin on the oyster-banks" (165).

But is the writer-narrator to wallow in the silent abysses, lost in *laissez-faire*, content to migrate up and down from one side of the double pattern to the other? How is the artist to emerge from such a discursive movement?

Art and the Artist

The double thread pattern so prevalent in the Millerian text is also seen in the apparent contradiction in Miller's stance towards art. Whereas he says about *Tropic of Cancer* that it is not a book but a defamation of character, slander, a long insult, a gob of spit in the face of everything which calls itself art, and a strong and vigorous kick to God, Love, Destiny, and all the cherished ideals (*Cancer*, 10), later on, in 1961—when, interestingly, he is no longer writing the Millerian text,—he turns mellow and seemingly retracts his words: "I never turned my back on art; I may have been defiant, nothing more. I may only have believed (naively) that art is capable of more than men have dared hoped for" (quoted in Mathieu, 1976a, 49).

More traditional critics, like Edward Mitchell, have tried to account for the discrepancy by ascribing to Miller an aesthetic approach to art that harks back to Platonic theories of the function and place of the artist in society. Plato, one recalls, vehemently attacks the poet for his is the domain of illusions, make-believe, and thrice-removed imitation. The poet stirs the audience's emotions by playing on the sensitive and imaginative registers, causing havoc to society's ideals of order and the quest for philosophical truth. To Mitchell, Miller and Plato are almost identical except for the fate reserved to the poet: whereas Plato wants to banish him, Miller wants the artist, in fact, to *rule* society (Mitchell, 1966, 103). Mitchell assures us that the artist, meaning Miller, following in the footsteps of John Dryden, is a "seer" (107) who obviously gives his audience glimpses of what lies beyond. Coming near to a Barthean perspective, Mitchell adds: "Thus the greatest sin that could be committed against the artist is to take him 'at his word,' to find in his work a final answer, a fulfillment, a plan to be adopted, rather than an intimation of possibility" (109).

Aware of the potentials of a text which transcends logocentric oppositions and fixations, Miller remarks about his number one movie, Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*, that the "world must be turned upside down, ransacked, confounded in order that the miracle may be proclaimed" (*Selected Prose II*, 427). The "miracle," of course, is not one possessed of

metaphysical or purely esthetic qualities, but one of *writerliness* as I have shown before, the miracle being effected on the reader through a re-adjustment of semiotic dimensions with the resulting ludic activity. The real artist/writer is one who belongs to a race of *mimetic killers* who ultimately die on the pyre of their own text:

Side by side with the human race there runs another race of beings, the inhuman ones, the race of artists who, goaded by unknown impulses, take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread and the bread into wine and the wine into song...A man who belongs to this race must stand up on the high place with gibberish in his mouth and rip out his entrails. (*Canter*, 255-256)

It is clear from this passage that the artist transforms the "soggy dough" into "bread" and "wine" by transcending the mimetic yoke and arriving at the semiotic level which is neither life nor lifelessness, for by uplifting the whole signifying system of the language, another dimension is reached. How close is this to the surrealist notion that "surrealism" is a stage that transcends both reality and dream? Is the surrealist writer a tool in the hands of the language? Not really, because after all, surrealists rely on *another* artist, the inner one who, whether they want it or not, is still an entity that speaks *through* language. The Millerian artist, however, faces a tragic fate, that of standing up and ripping up his own entrails, so that nothing subsists but the text and the interplay of the signifiers. The reader experiences artistic phenomena in an almost ethereal exchange of signs.

Even if Linda Lehrer asserts, basing herself on what Miller-the-narrator himself says, that the *Tropics* and *The Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy tell and retell the story of Miller's artistic development (Lehrer, 1975, 18), that most of his books, biographical or not, are "the story of a Poet" (25), I prefer to side with Parl who convincingly demonstrates, from a more stylistic point of view, that the real battles in the works of Miller, especially the earlier ones, are structural and linguistic (Parl, 1979, 16), an attempt by the writer to reflect on modern theories and try his own hand at the linguistic material available. The "inner man" of the surrealists, though portrayed by Miller, still is a mirror of the meaninglessness of meaning: he has a head with six faces and eight eyes, the head acting as a revolving lighthouse, the top of which, instead of the usual crown, is a huge hole which ventilates whatever is left of the brain. This type of man is, as such, beyond suffering (*Capricorn*, 277).

The "inner man," like a Tantric deity, armed with the weapons of verbal structuration, mercilessly kills the reasoning power of the reader. According

to the surrealists, this is done so that surreality can be expressed from the inside with no hindrance whatsoever; according to the Millerian text, this is achieved so that the search for an absolute meaning is aborted and replaced by the double-patterning movement from mimesis to semiosis. In the Millerian text, then, this "inner man," taken as the locus of that movement, is replaced by the reader.

The ludic nature of art in general and of writing/reading in particular is more explicit in Miller's treatment of painting as collage: after having finished his paintings, he and his friend used to wash them off, scrape them, smear them with coffee grounds, bread crumbs, coal and arnica, and soak them in the bathtub for hours (*Black Spring*, 69). While the reader cannot but detect some sort of parody of surrealist art in this passage, the visual and collage-like quality of painting is extolled: "It's a masterpiece, I tell you! I've been studying it for the last three hours." The chance encounter ardently sought by the surrealists is realized, and the result, though at first only attributable to accident, can only be in fact miraculous, for every birth is, indeed, miraculous (74).

But who is the instrument of such certainty arising out of chaos? Is it the painter/writer, the brush/pen, or the colours/words? Again, in the purest Barthean and Derridean spirit, Miller leaves the question pending. All searches for an origin are bound to reach a zero point where the only certainty is that nothing is always ever certain and that words will keep playing long after the critic's reason has given up: to Miller, all live, pulsing data is labeled "minus;" when one finds the "plus" equivalent, the balance, one is left with absolutely *nothing* (74).

Miller's experiments with this kind of painting, along with the graphemic equivalent in the text, have made him acutely aware of the issue of art and madness. We have already seen the surrealists' uneasy relationship with psychoanalysis stemming directly from Freud's rejection, or indifference to, surrealist attempts at coming to terms with the "inner man," and the former's question as to the value of such endeavours. Miller, like the surrealists, was very interested in "mad people," but only from an artistic or esthetic point. Walker Winslow recalls that "Henry was deeply interested in the insane...but totally incurious about modern diagnosis and treatment...he was interested in insanity only as it revealed an extension of man's normal reality" (Winslow, 1951, 68).

Obviously, the "extension of man's normal reality" can be read as the jump from the "everyday" unmarkedness of mimesis to that of the "otherworldliness" of semiotics. The jump, when translated into the world of action, is very easily labelled hallucination, madness, and schizophrenia.

When translated into writing or art in general, it is ultimately recognized as genius, even if at first it shows the marks of unintelligibility and buffoonery, *for what is the double pattern if not the schizophrenia of the text?* Let me recall the instructive words of Barthes that sum up what a writer is: "Tout écrivain dira donc: *fon ne puis, sain ne daigne, névrosé je suis*" (Barthes, 1973b, 13): the writer, facing his/her text, is in the unenviable position of being neither totally mad nor totally sane, but a neurotic entity who is lost in its own illusion.

Another symptom of what critics call madness is the going beyond what is accepted, by flouting *mesure* and lingering in markedness, like Yannopoulos in *The Colossus of Maroussi*.

He wasn't crazy—he was *mad*. There's a difference. His voice was too strong for his body: it consumed him. He was like Icarus—the sun melted his wings. He soared too high. He was an eagle. These rabbits we call critics can't understand a man like Yannopoulos. He was out of proportion. He raved about the wrong things, according to them. He didn't have *le sens de mesure*, as the French say. There you are—*mesure*. (*Colossus*, 70)

There is a thin line dividing *saturation* from *convergence*, and the writer, aware of the power of the language, neurotically watches his/her text swinging from madness to sanity. It is a tribute to the Millerian text to have kept a precarious balance between sanity and madness and exhibited *convergence* at its best without sinking into unintelligibility.

Is then the Millerian text's stylistic success due to a thoroughly thought-out plan or is it the result of accident and chance?

Chance

Miller was aware of the fundamental concept of chance in surrealism, and transformed it into a textual device more in accord with the variations and fluctuations of the double pattern. First, in typical Millerian fashion, the sordidness of the umbrella and the sewing machine coming together on the operating table is reproduced in the rapprochement of sex:

Lying on the beach with our toes in one another's crotch. Like two surrealist objects demonstrating a hazardous *rencontre*. (*Sexus*, 239)

A step further and the blurred but static vision above is translated into the chance-like work or collage and the *objets trouvés*.

The still life...might be an artless arrangement of objects which no one in his senses would have bothered to look at twice. For example—a few playing cards lying face up on the sidewalk and next to them a toy pistol or the head of a missing chicken. Or an open parasol torn to shreds sticking out of a lumberjack's boot, and beside the boot a tattered copy of *The Golden Ass* pierced with a rusty jack-knife...Extraordinary, when one takes up the pursuit of such chimeras, to discover what amazing trivia, what sheer insanity, infests some of the great masterpieces of art (*Nexus*, 242)

All great works of art, whether in painting or in writing, exhibit the "sheer insanity" of meaningless collages where seemingly unconnected images and semantic units meet on the canvas or on the paper to produce the much-wanted spark that will ignite, in the reader, a moment of stylistic pleasure and leave traces for ulterior recognition. In the Millerian text, the surrealist concept of chance—loaded with psychological and ontological concerns—is replaced by the notion that the free play of words and images is sufficient unto itself, and points to naught but to itself. The reader is invited to join in the verbal feast where chance meets him/her at every corner. Indeed, the city matrix, combined with the act of flânerie, is also an allegory of the reader walking up and down the streets of the text, surprising him-/herself with fortuitous encounters that denude the signifier and leave it floating to amaze by the diversity of its signification. Going along the lines of a Barthean sense of pleasure, the Millerian text puts the reader in a high-alert situation of suspense, never fully disclosing its real path, always suggesting the interstices, the gaps, the alleys and passageways that run parallel to the lines on the pages of the text, and the ever-present danger of running into something or someone and getting diverted from one's original goal, as allegorised by the act of walking, randomly, in the streets (*Sexus*, 47).

One almost never knows when the discourse lifts off, so to speak, and disassembles its signs, re-shuffles them in a fortuitous manner, and then goes back, after the metamorphosis, to its original shape. Even though the matrix, the hypogram, and the model are fair instruments with which to gauge the extent of the suspense provoked, they are only guidelines, for on the level of *semiosis*, it is to be remembered, meaning is transcended and replaced by signification, or the mechanism by which signs work together. By chance is not meant the randomness of chaos or the meaninglessness of lexical combinations, but a discursive device which works as an allegory of the level of *semiosis*, of the marked side of the double pattern.

And it is also the allegory of chance which accounts for the passage from one side to the other, and for the smooth yet surprising alteration of stylistic *faits de style* between the two. The narrator/reader, in this writerly text, lives erotically on the edge which separates the marked from the

unmarked, and it is indeed chance which works on the streets of the text in order to bind what would otherwise be incompatible and holds the fabric together. The chance encounter is the *sine qua non* of the writerly Millerian text (*Capricorn*, 195).

As in Bakhtin's heteroglossia, Miller's text, in order not to disintegrate, must revolve around a centre or a hub, centrifugally, around a *structure* which maintains the whirling chance-like movement of the two modes together, while at the same time catering to a centripetal pull, a monoglossic control from within, a control against spillage and the overload of excess. This brings me to the next matrix.

The Hub and the Centre

*Although thirty spokes converge to the hub
It is the central void
Which makes the cart move*

Leo-tzeu, 1979, 41

The notion of the hub is an intricate one: it is a metaphor for both vacuity and presence, for the emptiness of meaning and the presence of signification. The Chinese philosophers were among the earliest to notice the properties of vacuity: the hub of the wheel, the necessity of empty spaces so that presence inhabits them. In the latter, vacuity is static, a not-being that needs a being to fill it and give it meaning and name: a vase filled inside is not a vase anymore; a concrete block of stone, cement, or hardened steel will never be usable unless it is hollowed out in the inside. In the former example of the hub and the wheel, vacuity is dynamic: the empty hub has to accommodate the axle or else the wheel will not revolve. Absence is filled by presence and presence is informed by absence. Both dynamic and static vacuities, however, share a common element, that of the centre.

But the centre is not the locus of a logocentric duality: it is clear from the examples above that it is not a reality as much as a *function*, and an indispensable one (Lentricchia, 1983, 174), for the continual shift from absence to presence precludes any attempt to see the hollowable-fillable centre as a static entity. The hub is not to be defined, for it exists only to revolve blindlessly in an ever-changing kaleidoscopic world (*Capricorn*, 48).

It is also from centre and hub as *function* that Bakhtin undoubtedly sees both monologic and dialogic discourses emerge with opposite movements,

centripetal and centrifugal, yanking language in two different directions around a vacuous hub.

It is true that the stylistic effect of Millerian markedness as represented in the different matrices evinces a tendency to distribute lexical items and semantic features out of the initial *model* in ways that concur with the reader's first impression of outward expansion away from the centre, a centre which is also the dead place where nothing can survive for long, especially the search for the ultimate meaning. In an Argus-like metamorphosis, the "eyes" of mimesis endlessly revolve like the spokes of a giant wheel and all that is left is the "name," the signifier:

You look at the stars and then you look at your navel. You grow eyes everywhere—in the armpits, between the lips, in the roots of your hair, on the soles of your feet... You drift around like that for years and years, until you find yourself in the dead center, and there you slowly rot, slowly crumble to pieces, get dispersed again. Only your name remains. (*Cancer*, 288)

Although the hub spells the death of the self, or of the signified, the text ultimately goes back to the centre and takes the reader with it on the semiotic ride. Like a prodigal son, Miller has long walked in pure unalloyed leisure along the streets of his youth. From "the perimeter of the six extremes" he has come back to the hub where transformation and change are the law (*Black Spring*, 172).

The expansion outward is indeed followed by a centripetal inward movement not to be mistaken for Balier's expansion-contraction movement which governs, according to her, the surrealist image in Miller. In fact, the double movement of the Millerian text is one where the motion inward, from mimesis to semiosis, from the external reality to the internal workings of signification, *means nothing but signifies everything*.

There is a wheel, there are spokes, and there is a hub. And in the center of the hub there is—exactly nothing... And you are there, in the center of nothingness, sentient, fully expanded, whirring with the whir of planetary wheels. Everything becomes alive and meaningful, even yesterday's snot which clings to the doorknob (*Secur*, 392)

"[Y]esterday's snot," meaningless *before* since heavily marked, acquires with the passage of the text from the mimetic periphery to the semiotic hub a semantic quality which it did not possess earlier. Indeed, the transformation of the text happens as if *in spite* of mimetic sordidness and the plainness of the unmarked elements. The hub is thus a new nexus of signification. Like converging spokes around a hub, the correlated matrices of wholeness,

fusion, and flow share in the shedding of additional light on the Millerian textual devices and techniques.

Flow, Fusion, and Wholeness

It will have been clear, throughout my exposition of the matrices, that, contrary to most surrealist writing, the Millerian text exhibits—and is bound to exhibit—a constant and cyclical movement from one side of the pattern to the other, from unmarkedness to the markedness and excess of its imagery that is permitted by the very concept of the endo-text.

It is indeed interesting to note that Dionysus, in Greek mythology, is, contrary to the other deities, a mobile figure, in perpetual movement, refusing to settle in one place in preference to another (Jeanmaire, 1978, 273). The Maenad's wild ramblings in the woods and plains re-create the image of a moving god. The flow feature has not escaped the attention of various critics: Mathieu sees Rimbaud's works, especially the latter's poem "After the Flood," as a seminal influence on Miller (Mathieu, 1976b, 145). Mailer, in his specific way, rhapsodises over the flow image:

Miller is the other half of literature. He is without fear of his end, a literary athlete at ease in earth, air or water. I am the river, he is always ready to say, I am the rapids and the placids, I'm the froth and the scum and turgor—what a roar as I go over the falls. Who gives a fart. Let others camp where they may. I am the river and there is nothing I can't join. (Mailer, 1976, 15)

Balliet reverts to a literary historical attitude by making of the flow matrix the vehicle or the image of Miller-the-writer's aspirations: by rejecting "commercialism, materialism, industrialism," Miller "finds solace in the pre-glacial river that flows and that he feels flowing through him" (Balliet, 1996, 100). Likewise, Frederick Hoffman makes of Miller an "organism," and his writings "secretions and excretions of that organism" (Hoffman, 1945, 49).

A more stylistically-oriented approach to flow is given by Martin who associates the flow of words in the text with running water, and Miller's skill at turning the faucet of words on and off at will (Martin, 1979, 254), a reminder, again, of the Millerian regulation of the flow. Ibarguen comes also very close to the double pattern concept but veers off in a tangent at the last moment, writing that Miller's "frenzied flow of words that 'comes off' the oppositions of presence and absence, subject and object, self and cosmos, begins where vision reaches its limit" (Ibarguen, 1989, 234).

In fact, the "flow of words" not only carries off the oppositions but unites them to form the Millerian structure: it is this to-and-fro motion that playfully takes the reader from mimesis to semiosis and back in a regular diastolic-systolic pattern. Just like with the wheel, it is the very absence in the form of the hub which ultimately produces movement. Flow is thus, thematically, and especially stylistically, a fundamental feature of the Millerian text:

[I] love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences...I love the words of hysterics and the sentences that flow on like dysentery and mirror all the sick images of the soul...I love everything that flows, even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund. I love scripts that flow, be they hieratic, esoteric, perverse, polymorph, or unilateral...The great incestuous wish is to flow on, one with time, to merge the great image of the beyond with the here and now (Cancer, 258-59)

A quick semantic feature check reveals that, contrary to the city matrix, flow exhibits +alive or +biological features: rivers, sewers, semen, blood, bile, dysentery, menstrual flow. Furthermore, a strong linguistic tie unites what flows with the registers of the language in an interestingly ascending mode: words, sentences, script, and, finally, the image. The image, the final stylistic effect, is that of the "beyond," and the text's attempt is to bring back this semiotic image onto the discourse, back to the "here and now," back to reality. The attempt, however, is thwarted by the inadequacy of the words, the signifiers, and the impotency of meaning, the signifieds.

The whole theory of Millerian stylistic deviation is thus summed up in the above passage: the text is constantly trying to *find itself*, to *represent itself*, to find a balance, a fulcrum out of which the incessant flow of words, sentences, and semantic features spills out in a "polymorphous" deconstructionist mode. Yet the attempt is made again and again in the text's "suicidal" drive: knowing it cannot attain the absolute, yet the urge, the flow, keep it going on.

Furthermore, the convergence of the flow of words, like that of a river, is an allegory of the seminal notion of stylistic *convergence* with which the Millerian text distinguishes itself from the surrealist one. Indeed, although the surrealist flow keeps ending at a dam, the resulting energy is not translated into the "spark" of electricity-energy, but in the bursting of the dam itself because of the incessant and impetuous stylistic "waters." Saturation explodes and destroys the river-bed of the text. The convergence of the Millerian text, however, acts like a safety valve that accepts yet controls the stylistic flow and "evacuates" or purges the excess waters.

Markedness flows into unmarkedness. I call this process a *self-cathartic* textual phenomenon: the energy, built up in an intensely marked passage, is re-directed towards an unmarked one with the resulting reader's impression of having been an active agent in the reading and "decoding" process. The reader is the narrator crossing the river-text on a bicycle¹³, as shown in the cobble-stone bridge crossing passage mentioned earlier. The equation between the flow of the river and the flow of life as it pulses through a complete individual entity is nothing less than a miracle allegorised in the image of a man crossing a river on a bicycle (*Black Spring*, 41).

Movement and flow, however, behave in a cyclical alternation with rest and a dynamic kind of stasis. After the flow, immobility; after the marked rush of the text, back to a "normality" that still carries the traces of what came before:

Laura the nympho brandishing her cunt, her sweet rose-petal lips toothed with ballbearing clutches...And then crash! Like pulling a switch the music suddenly stops and with the stoppage the dancers come apart, arms and legs intact, like tea leaves dropping to the bottom of the cup. (*Capricorn*, 98)

As the rush of waters carries with it the multitude of organisms in and above the river-bed, so does the text, especially if *convergence* is employed at its full, carry the registers of the language to produce an effect of fusion which will be allegorised in corresponding semantic features and thematic content. The images, imitating the stylistic flow, come in a pattern favouring fusion and synchronicity. In a seminal passage from *Black Spring*, markedness is achieved, this time, not on the level of the language but on that of the notion of convergence of all the semantic themes together. What is more important, the synchronicity displayed is reached within the frame of a *narrative* structure; sequentiality and the synchronous moment are welded into one discursive event where Silberstein, the pants maker, turns mad, his pregnant wife delivers on the streets next to him; Professor Martin, the bug exterminator, lets go of his ferrets hidden in his coat pockets; Stanley Borowski chases a ferret down the sewer and is attacked by Professor Martin's son Harry. Viewing the whole scene from a distance, Willie Maine stands with his pants down, "jerking away for dear life" (*Black Spring*, 207).

The Maenadic trances, in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, lift the performer to a state where the self is fused into that *other* reality dreaded by the advocates of order (Nietzsche, 1967, 36). Likewise, the flow of the text fuses the seemingly disparate elements of the discourse into a unity of signification, not into one of meaning. The much-sought signified is lost and

replaced by the unity of the interplay of signifiers. In the memorable words of Derrida, the "absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" (Derrida, 1997, 280), a notion which, far from contradicting concepts of convergence, centre, and hub, endows them with limitless readability.

Again, the trance-like nature of the Maenads, or of deviator passages in their full markedness, this repetition-like phenomenon leads, in Barthean terms, to "enter into loss, into the zero of the signified" (Barthes, 1973b, 67). In the midst of this zero state, in the eye of the cyclone, in the vacuity of the hub, in the perpetual motion of no-motion, all spokes converge towards the dead, zero centre, where all differences are ruthlessly crushed. In an apparent reference to the surrealists' "poisson soluble" image, Miller says:

God has thought everything out in advance. We have nothing to solve: it has all been solved for us. We have but to melt, to dissolve, to swim in the solution. We are soluble fish and the world is an aquarium. (*Colossus*, 166)

In a more marked passage, the narrator expresses his awe at the wholeness of vacuity:

Out of nothingness arises the sign of infinity, beneath the ever-rising spirals slowly sinks the gaping hole. (*Cancer*, 253)

The Barthean parallels are clear: the Millerian text is a writerly product that disseminates, in polyform fashion, meaning in a unity of signification based on a double pattern, a lay-out that respects spaces and succession mechanisms.

The fusion that results from flow also creates the matrix of wholeness, the *summum* of both a thematic and linguistic sense of completion: Dionysus is, paradoxically, also represented as a *stone* in addition to his feature of mobility. At the top of a log of wood or a stone pillar is hung the mask of the deity (Jeanmaire, 1978, 11). The paradox might at first seem insurmountable and of the nature of contradiction. However, the stone or wood symbol is far from being a static emblem of the god. In fact, stones and wood are the representations of the primeval forces of nature, the rock as the foundation of the world humans live in, the material on which life is built, and wood as the emblem *par excellence* of the green powers of nature. Lao-tzeu, one of the semi-mythical fathers of Chinese Daoism, describes, in his famous Dao-de-Jing ("The Way and its Power"), the wise as "pure and simple like a virgin block of wood" (Lao-tzeu, 1979, 49).

From an archetypal side, Jane Nelson sees Miller's self-description as a rock as an assertion of wholeness (Nelson, 1970, 122), obviously reached after the struggle between the "I" and the unconscious. The "happy rock" is that state when the realisation of the infinity of phenomena is reached and, in *Tropic of Capricorn*, where the goat-like animal of the title symbolises the solidity and rock-like quality of what has been achieved. In a Bloomean sense, or *despite* Bloom's theory of the esthete and the "strong" precursor, the "true rock of the self," the "happy rock" emerge out of the chaos of the soul. The poet's style expands in a proportionally inverted form: the "happier" the rock, the denser the concentration gathered, as it were, on a pinhead (*Capricorn*, 187), until the energy accumulated reaches its maximum in an almost-zero dimension. Similarly, Bataille's vision of excess and expenditure had him create a symbol for a secret society called "Acéphale," ("headless" or "brainless"), the description of which runs thus:

Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison. He has found beyond himself not God, who is the prohibition against crime, but a being who is unaware of prohibition. Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster. (Bataille, 1993, 181)

The prohibition of deviation is lifted, or ignored altogether, and the "headless," i.e., meaningless entity which arises is neither solely the writer nor the reader, but one which combines all in one text, the "monster."

Pure energy in infinitesimal space; the original universe, a super-dense vacuity with infinite power and dissemination. The text, and especially the Millerian one, behaves similarly: the most correct ratio of marked to unmarked, from a reader's point, is reached, and the ensuing self-cathartic mechanism plunges both reader and text into the zero-degree of signification.

At that level, the "g-force" is so strong that a "black hole" of signification is attained: light (meaning) cannot escape the black hole and every object gravitating in its orbit is mercilessly sucked in. The stylistic wholeness of the text stems from this energy-thirsty entity produced by the discourse. Again, the double pattern concept is evident in this context: just as the universe expanded (and is still expanding) from an original nothing, so is the text expanding and contracting, not in the way Balliet sees it, with

negative connotations, but in the full necessity of its intrinsic nature. Each day, Miller symbolically stretched out so much that he felt his skin was covering the whole world and then, in a necessary counter-movement, shrank to the size of a pinpoint (*Capricorn*, 61). The unmarkedness of expanding, of being like others, of bowing to the norm, and the markedness of contracting, of being one's own self and exhibiting one's own peculiar stylistic *faits de style*, of returning to the happy rock state or original fecundating density.

In a Zen-like satori moment of pure and un-reasoned enlightenment, Miller discovers that in wholeness no boundaries can survive, and that there never was a boundary line anyway, it was he who had made it. When the realisation of this truth dawns, everything suddenly *belongs*:

I am at home everywhere, only I did not know it before. But I know now... I walk slowly and blissfully through the streets. The beloved streets (206)¹⁴

What the Millerian text is revealing to us is the enlightenment of the discourse. It is the writer first and then ultimately the readers who create boundaries in the text, dividing between what is the "norm" and what is "deviation," between what is "unmarkedness" and what is "markedness," and finally between "Apollo" and "Dionysus." As Greek tragedy is the coming together of the two young gods, so is the text: the happy marriage between the two sides of the double pattern, and a union so complete, a *convergence* so adequate, that the fusion is arrived at, and the boundary lines are erased. When this is realised, the writer and the reader walk "slowly" and "blissfully" on the streets of the one, stylistically unified text.

It is Miller's distinction to have given his readers such streets to walk on.

NOTES

1 My italicising.

2 As I mentioned in the introduction, I identify "poem" with literariness.

3. Notice the similarity with the Lautréamont passage about petrification quoted in Part I.

4. The Whitmanesque intertext is obvious in the opposition between the "cosmocentric cesspool" and the "rich, fecundating dream," where life is produced from what appears as filth and decay:

Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung. (Whitman, 1949, 44)

5. Notice the narrational aspect of the experience.

6. Orwell's mistake, however, is comprehensible and easily forgiven, for he personally
 in a Millerian sense, and in the same way as I have done it here.

join in the fight in the civil war tearing Spain, he was intrigued about Miller's complete lack of interest in the war. Miller told him point-blank that to go to Spain at that time would be the act of an idiot (Orwell, 1953, 16). For Orwell to take the step from Miller-the-author to Miller-the-narrator/hero is understandable.

- 7 Charles Holdefer, in his "The 'Other' Whale: The Ideology of Passive Acceptance in the Work of Henry Miller," presents a thorough review of the topic from an authorial point of view.
- 8 See earlier in Chapter 11 for Norman Mailer's tree image as applied to the Millenan double-pattern.
- 9 The parallels with Whitman, again, are striking.
- 10 Mike Woolf, in "Henry Miller and Kate Millet: Strange Bedfellows" (1985) points to the non-originality of Millet's views on Miller and to her owing much to the American author's style in her own fiction.
- 11 The reference to Quetzalcoatl ("The Feathered Serpent"), the Aztec god, is worth noting.
- 12 Derrida has much to say about "invagination" and "fissures."
- 13 One is reminded here of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" poem.
- 14 D. T. Suzuki, in his *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, attempts to give, with more or less success, a summary of what satori is and what it is not (95–98). The similarities with the above from Miller is, to say the least, striking.

Conclusion

I will end this study by answering the question asked by Shapiro at the very beginning, "How is one to talk about Miller?" One is to talk about Miller indeed with the recognition that Miller is not only an author, but also a narrator, a protagonist, a persona, a voice, a series of paradoxes, and, above all, a *writing*. The *writing* of Miller I have called the "Millerian" text throughout in order to press home the peculiarities, and importance, of such a writing.

A writing of excess, a deviatory discourse of excessive images, the voice, dismissed for too long as a supplement, is to be re-read in the light of a text which juggles, with deceptive effortlessness, with economy, and with superlative results, between the unmarked and the marked, between noun and semiosis, between what is accepted and what has been—and still—rejected as clownish, buffoonish, or simply labelled as surrealistic.

A writing which owes to surrealism but which transcends and surpasses it because it goes beyond mere mechanicality in order to achieve a balance of the "day" and the "night" not attained in like fashion before.

A writing which is both presence and absence, the presence of Miller, the author and his absence in, paradoxically, his effacement from the Millerian text when the reader takes over and transmutes the text, a text alchemically, from something to be read to something to be experienced, created, and, finally, to be re-written.

Our re-reading of Miller is always our re-writing of it.

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Henry Miller is one of the least stylistically understood modern writers. Having been dubbed a Zen saint and ostracized as a happy pornographer, Miller is now relegated to the museum of literary oddities and his text treated with unjustified indifference. If the influence of French surrealism has been recognized by most critics and readers, it is not without a cost: Miller is safely classified as a "surrealist" writer and most, if not all, of his stylistic peculiarities are thus conveniently disposed of. What Miller's texts share with those of the French surrealists is an imagery of excess, indeed, but one which is economically and masterfully geared toward a reader whose response(s) help in constructing a peculiarly Millerian version of stylistic deviation. This study focuses on the way this "Millerian text" invites a fresh re-reading of one of America's leading modern authors.

"Through a combination of knowledgeable comparisons with surrealism and theoretically informed close readings of texts, Paul Jahshan has helped us to appreciate once again—but in different ways—the importance of Henry Miller."

*Douglas Tallack, Professor of American Studies,
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